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GST INCLUSIVE

OVAL REVAMP THRILLS GLORY CAMP

By Richard Kreider

The first stage of Perth Oval's $11 million reconstruction is all but complete and so far its smiles all round from Perth Glory and its multitude of followers after the first couple of National Soccer League matches there this season.

"It's great that we now have a purpose-built stadium in Western Australia," said one of Glory's long-term players Bobby Despotovski, who netted the very first goal at the revamped complex. "I'm especially looking forward to seeing it stage international games," he said. The popular striker celebrated his 200th game for the Glory last Saturday against the Football Kingz.

The Australian under-23 team will play in the first international there on January 7, when they face South Korea in a friendly hit-out before the OFC Men's Olympic qualifying tournament.

There is no question 'The Shed' fans have been as much a success story as the club they support. Now that their exclusive standing area will be closer to the game, there is every expectation their choral support will be even more stirring and daunting for the opposition. Once complete, that end of the ground will have the capacity to hold 2,000 standing supporters.

"There have been so many games where they've carried us over the line," said Despotovski, who knows just how valuable the Shed support has been since the club first entered the competition in 1996. "It's certainly going to be more intimidating for opposing goalkeepers," he teased.

"I've experienced the Shed at (Arena) Joondalup although they were a fair distance from the games," said defender Shaun Murphy played his first NSL game at Perth Oval a fortnight ago. "Now, I expect them to have a bigger say with them being closer to the action."

"Half the teams in the English first division would be very happy with a stadium like this and there is probably just as many clubs who would be happy to have Glory's crowd too!"

"This is the most professional club in Australia and now this stadium simply tops it off," said Murphy who is settling well at his new club since leaving the intensity of English football last season.

"I've been back four months now and its going ok," he said. "The starting eleven is nothing like last season but we are now at the half-way mark and have settled in well - although I honestly thought would take a lot longer to gel."

"The side is also doing well in the league and as we all know, people will always support a winning team," said the former Sheffield United stopper.

The Oval is now known as Members Equity Stadium following a three and a half year sponsorship agreement with the NSL club. However, the rectangular venue in East Perth will also be used for rugby and lacrosse. There has also been talk of WA's World boxing champion Danny Green using the complex for a super-middleweight title fight.

By the cutest of coincidences, Perth Oval was in fact first owned by the Loton family, who sold it to the City Council in 1904. The State's soccer governing body was invited to purchase part of the 'paddock' but didn't have enough capital, despite the offer of a healthy contribution from the then Attorney General, Septimus Burt. The official opening of the ground is early next year - one hundred years later.

Meanwhile, Glory's assistant coach Alan Vest remains both confident and cautious despite the second-half of the season being played mostly on home soil.

"It has been tough, there is no question about that and I don't think the team has received the credit it deserves, especially from the media in the East," said Vest on the mammoth task of playing almost half-a-season on the other side of the country.

"The pressure is now on at home but we always want to win at home," ended Vest. It's been a tremendous Christmas for Glory, who apart from moving into a revamped ground, was named the Channel 7 Team of the Year 2003 at the ANZ Sports Star Awards earlier this month.

The 'NEW SHED' in its new found Glory.

What's Inside ABSW This Week:

- Bresciano To Sampdoria? (Page 2)
- Tony Raciti Honoured (Page 4)
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- Northern Spirit's Life-line (Page 5)
- Beware of Alex Brosque (Page 14)

Back Page colour special on European Player of the Year - Pavel Nedved

and loads more hot stories on the NSL and Overseas action from England and Scotland

***Important Message:**

Just to let readers know that this week, the paper will adopt a 24-page spread due to the festive season but rest assured, the usual 32-page spread of soccer's only Australian newspaper will continue again on the 7th of January.

Readers don't despair, you will not miss a beat on the on-goings of the National League and our weekly look on the world stage.

Don't forget our extensive 8-page NSW page spread as well.

ABSW EXCLUSIVE:

NED ZELIC - THE REAL STORY

By Daniela Raco

NED ZELIC is back in town sparking rumors that the former Socceroo star could be one of the first big names targeted by a new Victorian club which is bidding to replace the Melbourne Knights and take one of Melbourne's two top spots in the reformed Australian Premier League.

Zelic has finished up with his Japanese club, Urawa Red Diamonds and is considering the option of playing out his final years in his homeland. Our game could do with a Zelic or two, or maybe three.

His successes are noted. He was the golden boy of Australian soccer. Ned Zelic made us proud as his Olyroos rocketed past the classy Dutchman on their way to Barcelona '92. Audacious and sublime, a description that fits not only "that goal" but this amazing player.

Zelic enjoys the big stage. He has enjoyed a successful career in Europe, and more recently in the J-League First-Division.

In a career dogged by controversy and a catalogue of injuries, Zelic has no regrets. Frank Farina's first game in charge of the Socceroos at the tail end of 1999 was Zelic's last. Zelic left the team hotel and hasn't worn the green and gold since.

It was a bold move by Farina to have a player of Zelic's calibre travel half way across the world and to then name him on the bench. Hasn't Frank heard that it's easier to replace a coach than it is a player of Zelic's stature? If Farina was "experimenting", let's just say it was an experiment gone wrong.

Turn to pages 12 and 13 for the exhaustive interview with the man in question. It is the first full-length interview Ned Zelic has granted to any media in the country since his return from Japan.

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aussies*abroad*

BY DANIEL KUZIOW

Adrian Madaschi backed up his MOM award against Dunfermline Athletic by signing a new six-month deal with Partick Thistle on Tuesday.

"To win a man of the match is a pleasure, but I think the most important thing was the three points but there wasn't just one man of the match on Saturday it was a real team effort, with those at the side of the park playing a very important role as well," the Aussie defender told the Jags' official website.

"We certainly are going about things really well, we have a good mentality, we are all positive, we are giving 100% in training and I think we have to keep putting that in to get the rewards.

Adrian Madaschi is travelling well with Scottish side Partick.

"Derek (Whyte) and Gerry (Britton) have made a big impression. Everyone in the dressing room is very pleased with the appointments. We get a lot of encouragement in training and everyone is getting stuck in. They give you encouragement to try different things and that has spread to those even outwith the first team so that is a very positive thing.

"I feel personally that I am getting used to the pace of the Scottish game. It is different from Italy and perhaps the main difference is the work that you have to put in and everyone at the club is working to the same goal.

"I was pleased when the management asked me to sign for the rest of the season. I am very happy here at the club, getting on with everyone in the dressing room has not been a problem but the only real problem is the cold!"

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Millwall insist there has been no approach from Southampton for midfielder Tim Cahill.

Lions chairman Theo Paphitis said this week that no formal enquiry had been made by the south coast club.

Player-boss Dennis Wise also confirmed: "If something definite is forthcoming then we will take it from there.

"I know there is interest but unless something formal comes from the club, it will mean nothing. And we have had no approach."

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Crystal Palace defender Tony Popovic says he was honoured to be given the captain's armband earlier this month for the game against Nottingham Forest.

The Australia international has established himself as one of the most consistent defenders in the First Division this season.

Popovic captained former teams Sydney United and Japanese-based Sanfrecce Hiroshima before he joined the Eagles.

"It was a special moment for me and being captain is something I enjoy. When Kit asked me to be skipper for the day, it was great. I was honoured," he said.

"I feel I should contribute as a leader and try to get us out of the mess we're in."

Popovic's influence on youngster Gary Borrowdale has been acknowledged this season and the Aussie added, "I think Gary's come along really well.

"He's had some good games. He's now able to play two games a week and becoming physically stronger.

"He's got time as he's only a young lad and is showing the potential we know he's got.

"We all try to help the younger lads. He's on my side of the defence. He's a great kid, and if I can help him out in any way. I'll try to do that."

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Maccabi Haifa are chasing Ajax's Aussie midfielder Jason Culina.

With the Dutch giants losing their major backer, Ajax are being forced to cut loose several of their fringe players.

A Wanted Man – Jason Culina.

Culina attracted an enquiry from Sparta Rotterdam earlier this month, but Ajax refused to do business as they only wanted the Australia U23 player on-loan.

Maccabi are ready to table a bid for Culina in January and the club's manager, Ronny Levi, confirmed: "We have seen that Culina is a brilliant player with fantastic qualities. He could be a real asset for Haifa."

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Sampdoria have been linked with Parma midfielder Marco Bresciano.

The collapse of Parmalat is forcing Parma to open talks with interested club over the transfers of several of their best young players.

Gazzetta dello Sport says Australia international Bresciano is being chased by Sampdoria and could attract a serious bid when the transfer window opens this week.

Aussie striker David Zdrilic is expected to avoid the cull at Aberdeen during January's transfer window.

Zdrilic has been mentioned in reports as a candidate to be sold by the Dons, but boss Steve Paterson is now indicating he is prepared to back the powerful hit-man.

Frenchman Eric Deloumeaux, Benin international Laurent D'Jaffo and reserve keeper Ryan Esson are expected to be put up for sale or offered free transfers.

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Birmingham City winger Stan Lazaridis says he enjoyed playing out of position at left-back in last Friday's 2-1 win over Manchester City.

The Aussie even quipped afterwards: "I think I shocked the manager. He said before the start of the game that he thought I'd be that well-known German left fullback 'Hans Full'...!

"Seriously, he said he just wanted me to go and do a job for the team.

"With Jamie (Clapham) out and Martin Grainger not fit we were in a bit of a crisis.

"He said that in some ways I'd actually get more of the ball as I was coming on to it and that the opposition wouldn't mark a left-back.

"I think being there kept Shaun Wright-Phillips and Sun Jihai in two minds whether they should bomb on or not, just in case I broke on them.

"I've played there 40-odd matches for Australia so I am used to it and it is more of an attacking role with me.

"What is important is to have a good centre-half next to you and Matthew Upson was talking to me all the time."

Lazaridis added, "We want to avoid being involved in a relegation fight as soon as possible and then go on from there."

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Sampdoria could be the new destination for Marco Bresciano.

St Johnstone boss Billy Stark has decided against offering ex-Dundee midfielder Mark Robertson a contract.

The Australia international has been with Saints for much of this season, first on-loan and then as a free agent after Dundee were placed into administration.

The former Bradford City midfielder is returning to England in search of a new club.

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Serie A surprise packet Ancona are chasing Cardiff City defender Tony Vidmar.

The 32 year-old Australia international has been outstanding at promotion chasing Cardiff this season after joining the Welsh giants in the summer on a free transfer from Middlesbrough.

Ancona scouts have checking on Vidmar's form in recent weeks and are ready to offer him a deal in January.

The ex-Rangers defender has a contract with Cardiff to the end of the season, but Ancona hope to secure him when the transfer window opens next week.

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Young 16-year-old Sydney-born Joel Vasquez last week had the chance of a lifetime after he was awarded trials at English Premier League club Tottenham Hotspurs.

Currently playing in Malta and having represented Malta at U17's level, Vasquez has been rated as a huge talent in his new found country.

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AIS graduate Chris Tadrosse could well see out his future in Belgium after the exciting star has been rumoured to be on the move.

Having just finished his two-year stint at the AIS, Tadrosse will hope that an overseas move does prevail – thus starting up his ambitions of playing abroad. It is believed that a couple of current AIS graduates from 2003 are set to by-pass the National League and head straight to Europe. Phillp Makrys and Dez Giraldi have been awarded trials at Italy's Empoli FC and left Aussie shores last Monday afternoon.

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Current West Ham Youth player Trent McClenahan last week stated exclusively stated to *ABSW* that his wish for 2004 is to gain a first grade contract at Upton Park.

Trent McClenahan is chasing a first grade contract at West Ham.

Having played week in week out with the side's youth squad, the next step is making a name for himself in the side's first team squad.

Currently in the Nationwide First Division, West Ham are hoping that a Premier League move will be back on the cards for next season.

Known for being a smart full-back, McClenahan's contract is up very soon and stated that if something does fall through with West Ham, that staying in England will be his next option.

The 18-year-old also stated that he hopes to make next year's U20 squad and is hoping that Ange has set his eyes on his performances in England.

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ROAD TO ATHENS 2004

Wednesday, 14 January 2004
Marconi Stadium, Sydney
Round 1:
Papua New Guinea vs. Solomon Islands 5:00pm
Australia vs. Samoa 7:30pm
Fiji bye

Friday, 16 January 2004
Marconi Stadium, Sydney
Round 2:
Australia vs. Papua New Guinea 5:00pm
Solomon Islands vs. Fiji 7:30pm
Samoa bye

Sunday, 18 January 2004
Marconi Stadium, Sydney
Round 3:
Papua New Guinea vs. Fiji 5:00pm
Samoa vs. Solomon Islands 7:30pm
Australia bye

Tuesday, 20 January 2004
Marconi Stadium, Sydney
Round 4:
Samoa vs. Fiji 5:00pm
Australia vs. Solomon Islands 7:30pm
Papua New Guinea bye

Thursday, 22 January 2004
Marconi Stadium, Sydney
Round 5:
Samoa vs. Papua New Guinea 5:00pm
Australia vs. Fiji 7:30pm
Solomon Islands bye

Final Play-off:
Monday, 26 January, 2004
First Playoff:
Group A winner* vs. Group B winner
*Should Australia win Group A,

Parramatta Stadium
in Sydney will host the first leg play-off match

Friday, 30 January, 2004
Second Playoff:
Group B winner vs. Group A winner
Venue location subject to Group B winner

STRIKING OUT

By Glenn Davis

Brisbane Strikers 6-1 thrashing by Perth Glory proved a double blow for the Queenslanders following revelations veteran keeper Jason Kearton has been ruled out for up to eight matches with a knee injury.

The news comes on top of injury doubts over midfielder Warren Moon and striker Luke Morley.

Kearton had minor surgery on his patella tendon on Christmas Eve and is not expected to be fully fit until mid-February.

That leaves the Strikers with lanky 27-year-old Scott Higgins to cover Kearton and Josh Watson, who is untried at NSL level, as his understudy until Kearton returns.

"We won't expect Jason back until the last couple of matches of the season," Strikers coach Stuart McLaren said.

"It was case of getting it done now, otherwise it would be too late to have him back at all this season.

"We've got a couple of injuries now so it is a difficult time."

McLaren said the Strikers, with 23 points, were still on target to finish with their pre-season aim of 36 premiership points.

Meanwhile Queensland Lions will fight all the way for a place in the national league next season despite only one likely place from the north in the revamped league.

Lions' plan to spend

Jason Kearton: The Brisbane Strikers will miss the keeper's services for up to eight weeks due to injury.

$2.5m on their Richlands home ground in Brisbane's outer west and hope to complete work in time for the expected November start of the new competition.

Lions' chief executive Lawrence Oudenyk believes the club can impress the governing body with its business plan and convince them to grant an extra Brisbane licence.

"We think we are quality applicants and the NSL can't overlook us," he said.

"We are spending millions of dollars to get our ground to top standard and we have a business income not dependent on benefactors giving us money."

Lions are one of the richest sporting clubs in Queensland.

Oudendyk doesn't see Lions amalgamating with Brisbane Strikers or replacing them and believes both clubs can compete successfully as separate identities in the revamped league.

"I think there is definitely room for two clubs in Brisbane," he said.

"It would mean NSL soccer in the city every weekend with local rivalry and a local derby.

"Two clubs also would giver Queensland kids more opportunities to play at NSL level and I'm sure it would boost soccer's profile in this State," he said.

RACITI HONOURED

By Joe Russo

A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers President, Tony Raciti, was honoured at the recent Soccer NSW Annual General Meeting where he received life membership for his 30 years voluntary service to soccer in NSW.

Raciti is currently President of NSW Premier League club A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers and was previously President of the A.P.I.A. Juniors. When his length of time in each role is added together, it gives him 22 consecutive years as President of A.P.I.A.

A no-nonsense soccer administrator, Raciti has also had extensive involvement in coaching at the elite youth level. However, due to the administrative work required he has had to take a back seat from junior coaching.

Having been in the game for so long Raciti has definite views on a wide range of issues. He spoke to Sunday Night Soccer on 98.5FM recently and here is an edited extract from that interview.

Tony Raciti

Congratulations on your life membership.

Thank you. To be honest I very much appreciate the award but I must mention the club's [A.P.I.A.] proud history and tradition which obviously contributed greatly to the fact that I was given a life membership.

What are your thoughts on Australian soccer at the moment at youth level?

At lot of young players seem to make it at that level but don't seem to go any further.

Having been involved for so long I honestly think the problem is the fact that today, especially in NSW, players from say 13 to 17 years from the moment they get selected for any youth club they think they have already made the grade.

From there they automatically think, and the parents think the same way, that they have an opportunity of going overseas and making the grade over there. There is no hope in hell of that happening for 99% of players.

Do you think parental expectation is too high?

Absolutely far too high. I tend to blame the media a little bit. Parents pick up the paper and see that Viduka and Kewell are earning a fortune per week and they automatically think that is what is going to happen to their son, but unfortunately that is not the case.

A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers attended the Viareggio tournament in Italy, arguably the most prestigious Under 20 tournament for clubs in the world, in the last two years. How was that experience?

It was a great experience for the club but unfortunately this year we will not be participating due to financial constraints. We hope to be back there in 2005.

The level of the tournament is just mind boggling and I have never seen anything like it.

The last two years when I went to the tournament personally, what I saw during those two three-week periods was unbelievable. I saw and learnt more in six weeks in Viareggio than I have in 30 years of soccer in NSW.

How would you compare the standard of play today between the NSL and the NSW Premier League?

There is very little difference in standard. I go and watch a number of NSL matches and I would say that the NSL, as is today, is just a glorified Premier League competition – no more, no less, if that.

The public has a perception that the standard is very poor and in fact it is very poor. That is why crowd numbers are so poor and will continue to be so unless the standards are raised dramatically.

What do you think of the recent Task Force findings as announced by Frank Lowy? Do you think there are 10 investors out there with the money that is required?

The previous Soccer Australia or ASF always seemed to find 9 or 10, and this is with the utmost respect, lunatics that were prepared to invest.

I don't know about the future. Maybe they may not be lunatic consortiums in forthcoming years.

Perhaps if we have a structure like the NRL or AFL where the clubs, who may be investing $4.5 or $5.5 million per annum, are at least getting some grants back. However, if that doesn't happen, then you would have to be mad to be involved in something like that [new NSL competition]. You would have to be totally mad.

Do you have any thoughts on which Sydney teams may eventually be the three chosen Sydney teams for the new NSL?

I thought that Nick Politis was heading in the right direction. He was very switched on and cluey. He showed interest but only if there was one Sydney team.

If there is only going to be one Sydney team, then there is some chance that it will work but not if there are three.

Realistically Sydney Olympic is just a State League club playing in the NSL. They currently haven't got the money.

Parramatta Power have but are they prepared to continue losing $5 million per annum?

I don't think so.

Northern Spirit, well really, I would say that this is their last year. I've been reading in the media that Marconi should stay.

With the utmost respect to Marconi I cannot see, even given that they have one of the top registered clubs in NSW, how Club Marconi could spend $4 to $5 million per annum. It would be an impossibility if there is no return on their investment.

So in essence the reality for these clubs, and Sydney United, as a President of a NSW Premier League club, I welcome them back in our league in 12 months time. That is where they belong and that's the honest reality of the situation.

Sydney at the end of the day can only cater for one team similar to Perth and similar to Adelaide. I personally think that is what will eventually happen.

As a passionate administrator, how long more are you willing to continue in soccer?

I still have the passion even though it might be diminishing. Last season's Grand Final attendance at Lambert Park of 4,000 people has motivated me to keep going.

There has been an announcement of an Eastern Seaboard competition which will start in conjunction with the new Australian Premier League.

The NSL clubs that will be demoted and the NSW Premier League clubs that are interested in participating are going to form a new league.

Would A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers participate?

Yes, definitely we would. We have no choice but to because, if we don't, then I don't see much future for the club or any other NSW Premier League club for that matter.

If this Eastern Seaboard competition is going to be a serious competition, then there must be promotion and relegation.

ASA is stating that they are going to give the 10 nominated clubs a five-year tenure. That should never be the case. We are the only country in the world that doesn't have promotion and relegation.

[Sunday Night Soccer, 10.00pm 98.5FM]

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SPIRIT'S LIFELINE

By Luke Doherty

Northern Spirit chairman Antonio Gelonesi may have tentatively secured the long term future of the club through a series of successful meetings with investors and Soccer Australia.

Since the Northern Beaches based club was forced into receivership two weeks ago Gelonesi spent most of last week meeting with 'two or three' very interested investors — who are keen to take the Spirit into the new Australian Premier League.

Spirit's coach Lawrie McKinna has the up-most faith that the Spirit will find new backers very soon thanks to the help of Antonio Gelonesi.

The clubs short-term future also seems like it will be secured with one of those three investors wanting to bail out the club for the rest of the season and take the burden of Gelonesi who has been paying all the players and staff wages and most of the administration costs for months.

"He [Gelonesi] was with the administrator for most of last week and it has all been positive," said Northern Spirit coach Lawrie McKinna.

"Antonio has lined up two or three investors who are keen to put money in now as well as next season."

"Antonio is very enthusiastic. He could have just walked away after the club went into administration but he has been meeting with people and working hard."

"Soccer Australia is very positive they want to keep the Spirit going."

This isn't the first time that a cash crisis has hit the club. Two weeks before this start of this season, Spirit players held a crisis meeting amidst claims that they weren_t being paid wages even dating back to the end of the previous season.

Two weeks ago, after the Spirit battled out a draw with fellow strugglers Newcastle, Spirit coach Lawrie McKinna emphasised how loyal the current crop of players had been.

"We've got a great squad and they deserve credit for what they've done - they've hung in there since last Christmas." McKinna said.

Gelonesi did ensure the players that they would keep getting paid for every game that the Spirit are able to play.

"The money is a little bit behind but he has been paying it out of his own pocket."

"He has been paying out of his own pocket for months — out of his own personal account." McKinna said.

The Spirit ownership changed five times in as many years before Gelonesi took over. At the time he emphasised that he was making a long-term commitment and in doing so would make sure the club was re-structured and viable for a new league.

His foresight proved true. As soon as the club was put into administration, Gelonesi stressed that it wasn't the end for the club, but rather a new beginning.

"We have a great young squad. Now we can start focussing on football. For the last six months it hasn't been possible but now we can start focussing on the football again."

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(PLEASE TICK)
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Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

(H) ..... (W) ..... (Mob) .....

National Soccer League

Parramatta Power 4
Newcastle United 0

Parramatta Power rediscovered its touch and jumped back to equal leadership on the NSL ladder with a strong 4-0 win over Newcastle United at Parramatta Stadium on Friday night.

A month of mediocre results turned around thanks to a 15-minute second half blitz midway through second half that netted goals to Travis Dodd, Saso Petrovski and Ante Milicic. Petrovski scored his second goal in the 84th minute to round off the scoring.

Parramatta made the early running with Ante Milicic having a shot go whistling by the upright in the 2nd minute before Saso Petrovski and Fernando Rech fired the ball over the crossbar in two separate chances in the 5th minute.

The pressure continued on the Newcastle goal with Simon Colosimo and then Petrovski both having half chances with the head in the 9th and 10th minutes.

As with the Power performances early in the season, the bulk of the chances were coming from the right where Andre Gumprecht and Ahmad Elrich were combining well down the flank.

Parramatta continued to dominate but Newcastle had a good chance in the 21st minute when Josh Mitchell beat Paul O'Grady and his cross to Rya Griffiths was desperately cut out by Michael Beauchamp.

The best chance of the game came to Petrovski in the 29th minute when some sweet passing on the edge of the penalty box between Elrich, Milicic and Rech saw the ball drop enticingly to Petrovski but his volley from 5m went wide.

Power's Peter Zorbas (left) celebrated his 100th NSL match in style when Parramatta thumped the Novacastrians.

Esala Masi then butchered an equally easy opportunity in the 36th minute when he ghosted to the front post but his shot sailed over the bar.

Travis Dodd was next in line in the 39th minute when Gumprecht played a delightful ball that unlocked the Newcastle defence. With just Newcastle goalkeeper Tom Willis to beat, Dodd played the ball straight at his legs and the chance was gone.

The final chance of the half came in the 43rd minute when Petrovski ran onto a Gumprecht through ball but could not bring the ball down before Willis advanced and blocked his shot.

Power coach Nick Theodorakopoulos made one change at half time with Peter Zorbas coming onto the field for his 100th NSL appearance at the expense of Fernando Rech, who left the game seemingly uninjured.

The second half started at the same frantic pace of the first stanza and Colosimo could have bagged the opening goal when he decided to take a touch inside the penalty area with the goal beckoning and the Newcastle defence scrambled the ball to safety.

Two's a charm: Sasho Petrovski shown celebrating his two goals against Newcastle last week.

The go ahead goal finally came in the 57th minute when Travis Dodd scored against his former team mates. The goal can simply be put down to Petrovski brilliance as he held the ball well and slightly placed the ball behind the defence for Dodd to run onto. Dodd rounded Willis and calmly slotted the ball into the back of the net to make it 1-0.

Less than 60 seconds later Newcastle looked like equalising when a Johnson chip fooled everyone, including his own team mates, the Power defence and Clint Bolton and it harmlessly dribbled into the goalpost and back into Bolton's arms.

Power made it 2-0 with an exquisite goal to Saso Petrovski in the 62nd minute. Once again it was smart interplay between Elrich and Gumprecht and Petrovski scored from a neat first touch at the far post.

A minute later Millicic let fly with a curling right foot shot that brought out a world class save in Willis as the Power was starting to run rampant over the injury-depleted Newcastle side.

Milicic scored his 12th for the season but his first in four games when he finished off a bizarre goal in the 71st minute. A Petrovski cross deflected off Newcastle defender Craig Deans, onto the near post and then the back of Willis before it fell to Milicic who had no trouble to make it 3-0.

Newcastle remained positive and Jobe Wheelhouse had a certain goal ruined by some desperate defence by Dodd in the 76th minute when he managed to track back and clear the ball to safety as Wheelhouse was about to pull the trigger.

Petrovski made it a brace when he scored a neat goal in the 84th minute after Elrich cleverly headed the ball back across goal from the far post, giving Petrovski an easy task.

Brisbane Strikers 0
South Melbourne 1

By Glenn Davis

South Melbourne's grim reaper, the Brisbane Strikers, returned to haunt their championship battle with Perth Glory in a 1-nil loss at Perry Park on Saturday night.

The Strikers repeated their first round 1-nil victory over Souths with a 79th minute header from skipper Peter Grierson following a corner from Louis Brain.

South Melbourne, with superstars Con Boutsianis and Paul Trimboli starting on the bench, suffered a cruel first half blow to their hopes of breaking Brisbane's unbeaten home record when defender Steve Laurie was sent off in the 33rd minute.

Referee Mark Shield had no hesitation showing Laurie the red card instead of a yellow after the South defender took exception to some niggle from Brain and was caught shoving the midfielder with two hands.

The Strikers' victory was witnessed by its biggest home crowd of 3,417 this season.

Grierson has been the unsung hero for the Strikers since taking on the captaincy with consistent displays as the general in midfield and his game breaker was well deserved.

South Melbourne started the game as the league's leaders but under strong pressure at the top of the table from Perth Gory.

South Melbourne clearly dominated in the opening half until Laurie's send off.

Shield later infuriated South Melbourne when Strikers' defender Karl Dodd only received a yellow card after a deliberate hand ball as the last defender.

South Melbourne's lethal frontman Michael Curcija had only Dodd to round as the last man in defence before firing in a shot when the rangy Brisbane defender clearly punched the ball from Curcija's reach.

Curcija showed the visitors were not playing for a draw away from home when he struck a shot just wide of the upright after only five minutes.

Defender Scott Tunbridge gave the visitors another chance in the 13th minute heading an opportunity wide before Brisbane's Royce Brownlie almost gave the home side a surprise lead midway through the opening period. Brownlie rose high to head a cross from Brain into the ground and over the cross bar with South's keeper Eugene Galekovic well beaten.

Galekovic later made amends when he pulled off a fingertip save with his outstretched hand to deny Josh Rose a lightning volley from 25 metres in the 65th minute. The Strikers' win leaves them poised to challenge for a top two finish but assistant coach Luciano Trani was unwilling to talk about its finals hopes.

"The competition is too tight to think about positions," Trani said.

"There are no tearaway leaders and it's like a concertina effect at the moment and we're one of four or fight teams fighting for the top two."

Brisbane Strikers players celebrate their one-nil victory over high flyers South Melbourne.

National Soccer League

Perth Glory 4
Kingz 0

By Richard Kreider

Last Saturday was a special occasion for Perth Glory's Bobby Despotovski and it had nothing to do with his team's resounding victory over the current doormats of the National Soccer League, Football Kingz.

The club's champion netbuster celebrated his 200th club appearance on the night and though he failed to cap it off by finding the net, his contribution was nevertheless significant.

The 4-0 win at their Market Equity Stadium in front of 9,856 fans, allowed the defending champions to leap-frog South Melbourne to the top of the standings following the Victorian club's surprise defeat in Brisbane.

With two games in hand and eight of their last ten at home, it is going to take something of calamitous proportions to see them fail to secure a top-six berth, even at this stage of the season.

"We needed to guard against complacency which we did and I thought we deserved our victory," said Glory coach Mich d'Avray.

"At the end of the day, you got to be honest and say they were well beaten."

As for Kingz coach Tom Mason, however, life isn't so cheery at the other end of the table.

"It's all too easy to make excuses but when you go out there, it's eleven versus eleven," said Mason in defence of his club arriving in Perth the night before the game, after what is a lengthy journey for the New Zealand outfit.

"Today we were well beaten by a quality side."

Perth tore into their opponent's right from the first whistle and it was either wayward finishing or desperate defending that prevented the home side from breaking though until almost the half-hour mark.

The goal itself came from an unfamiliar source, a Despotovski corner which was headed past Ross Nicholson by Shaun Murphy from the six-metre line. It is the defender's first NSL goal for his new club.

Despotovski should have opened the scoring after just two minutes when a quality through pass from Nick Mrdja paved the way for the striker to goal, but his attempted chip drifted wide of the target.

Contrary to the resounding score-line, it wasn't all Glory over the ninety minutes. Livewire's Jeff Campbell and Tallan Martin gave the Perth rearguard some anxious moments, especially in the opening period.

The best came five minutes before the interval from Jeff Campbell, who fired a glorious strike onto the Perth crossbar from all of 25 metres that left Jason Petkovic frozen to the spot.

Both sides were forced to play with ten men for three minutes after John Tambouras (who was already bandaged from a midweek mishap) and Mrdja clashed heads in the 35th minute during an aerial challenge.

Perth failed to infiltrate the New Zealanders again until the 56th minute and it arose from some slick combination play involving Tom Pondeljak and Despotovski that ended with the former squaring the ball to the unmarked Gary Faria standing directly in front of the Kingz net.

The midfielder honoured his second first-eleven appearance of the season by thumping the ball with his left foot hard and low past Nicholson.

After competing with their highly fancied opponents for so ling, that second goal finally broke the visitor's resolve and it wasn't long before they went further behind.

It was Faria again involved in the action - this time after 62 minutes by supplying the ball for Mrdja to power home - directly in front.

The Kingz clearly lack aerial authority around their goal but this could all change next week with the arrival of former Glory sweeper Danny Hay, who is reportedly returning from English football.

Despotovski's world-class distribution display was capped off after 78 minutes when he provided the pass that enabled Mrdja to score his second goal of the game and the team's fourth, again from close range.

"It's good to be in the team, it's good to score goals," said Mrdja, who was in the side for the injured Damian Mori. "I only hope I can keep it up."

Glory brought on Perth SC striker Shane Crampton at the 81st minute for his debut appearance in the competition.

Meanwhile, one particular statistic has d'Avray beaming and it's one that would certainly please any of the other coaches in the competition.

"Our last two games have seen eight different goalscorer's and from a coaching point of view that's particularly pleasing," he said in his typical unassuming manner.

Gary Faria scored Glory's second goal in their four-nil victory over the Kingz.

Glory Boys Bobby Despotovski (Left) & Shaun Murphy (Right) played valuable roles in Perth's easy victory over the hapless Kingz.

Sydney United 0
Sydney Olympic 0

Two point-blank saves by goalkeeper Brett Hughes earned Sydney Olympic a precious point in the scoreless draw against Sydney United at the United Sports Centre.

The match ended in a flurry of excitement when referee Matthew Breeze dismissed one player from each team within eight minutes, late in the second half.

Olympic's Pablo Cardozo got his marching orders in the 75th minute for foul and abusive language. He had been on the field only two minutes.

It is believed that Cardozo could face a stiff suspension if found guilty of this offence.

United then lost defender Damon Collina for striking with an elbow.

Hughes ensured the draw when he deflected a great running shot from substitute Brendon Santalab in the 57th minute and somehow got a hand to a fierce close-range volley, again from Santalab, 11 minutes from time.

"Hughes was brilliant, I don't know how he got down to the second shot," United coach Grant Lee said.

"Collina lost his composure and the team needs to get out of holiday mode and back into the game."

Chances were few in the first half with neither keeper called into serious action.

A tame 16th minute header by Michael Baird was the first aggressive move from Olympic, while United made two threatening dashes five minutes later.

Franco Parisi weaved through the defence and fired from 15 metres but the shot was blocked away by Ante Juric.

One minute later, Anthony Doumanis put Mark Rudan in shooting position but his attempt was gathered by Hughes.

The second half was a marked contrast with players more willing to find the winner.

Olympic even kept pushing forward when down at one stage to nine men with Cardozo off and Zenon Caravella receiving injury treatment for four minutes on the sideline.

"We deserved to win this one as we had a lot of the play and I'm disappointed with the result," Olympic coach Peter Papanikitas said.

"The chances were there for us early in the game but it is one of those days we should forget and start again."

The Olympic coach said his team really needed the three points to remain a serious contender for the semi-finals.

"There are six or seven teams fighting for a play-off place and we now need to win some matches we are not expected to."

Juric was again outstanding for Olympic with his defensive play and his controlled runs, going close to grabbing the winner five minutes from time when he was stopped on the line by defender Joe Vrkic.

The United defence once more formed the backbone of the side, keeping a clean sheet and retaining the best record in the league with only seven goals conceded from 14 games.

Source - AAP

Pocket midfield rockets Anthony Doumanis (Left) & Zenon Caravella battled hard in midfield last Sunday afternoon.

National Soccer League

Wollongong Wolves 1
Melbourne Knights 1

Wollongong squandered two precious points when held by struggling Melbourne Knights in their National Soccer League clash at WIN Stadium.

The draw extended the Wolves' unbeaten run to eight games but after taking a second half lead through striker Stuart Young they will rue the result as two points lost.

Young converted a 49th minute penalty after strike partner Chimaobi Nwaogazi was clumsily brought down by Knights defender Steve Pantelidis.

Nwaogazi was bidding for an NSL record-equalling run of scoring in seven straight games, but aside from earning the Wolves penalty had no impact on the game.

Young showed composure to send Knights keeper Martin John the wrong way and give Wollongong a hard-earned lead in front of a season-best 3246 fans.

The Knights, having scored just 10 goals in their previous 14 games offered little attacking threat but struck an equaliser on 66 minutes.

Midfielder Daniel Vasilevski found space down the right and unmarked Kris Trajanovski scored with a fine header at the far post.

The Wolves lifted the tempo in the final 15 minutes with defender Bobby Dragas coming close with a header just over the bar.

But after an unbeaten run which included wins over three leaders - Parramatta, Perth and last weekend South Melbourne Wollongong - appeared flat.

They enjoyed the lion's share of possession but created few clear-cut chances in a disappointing match.

The result leaves Wollongong still just outside the top six, while the Knights remain second from bottom.

Wolves coach John Turner said after the club's victory over South Melbourne last week his team was guilty of complacency.

"I think there was an element of complacency which I had feared all week and you can't afford it in this league," Turner said.

"If you had seen the team that beat South Melbourne at Bob Jane Stadium and the team tonight, you'd have thought it was two different teams.

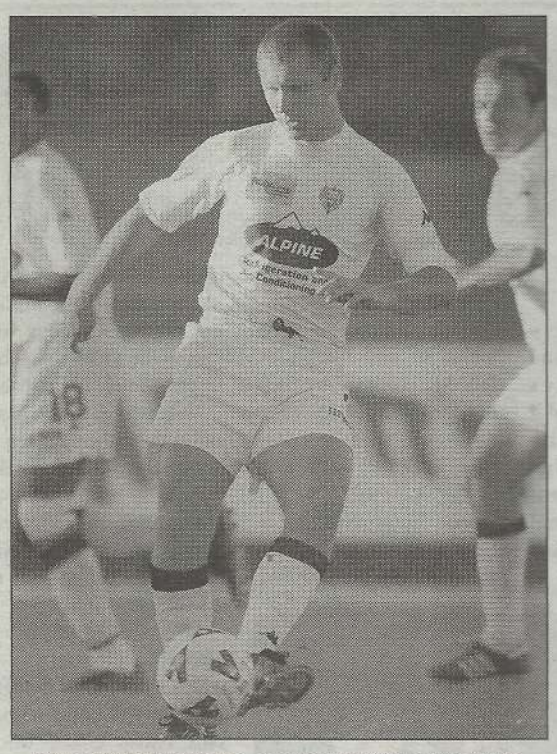
"I'm just disappointed with our home form. We can score three against South Melbourne but we weren't nearly the same team tonight."

Knights coach Ian Dobson was pleased to have picked up a point.

"It was what we deserved, I believe," Dobson said. "If you look at the stats, we had plenty of possession and kept working hard.

"We've had a terrible run of injuries and are just starting to get our players back on the field, I'm sure we're going to finish the season off strongly."

SOURCE - AAP



Stuart Young shown, scored his fifth goal of the season for the Wolves in their one-all draw against the Knights.

Northern Spirit 0
Marconi Stallions 0

By Luke Doherty

The split personality that runs through the Spirit team re-emerged at Pittwater Park on Sunday night as they somehow played out a scoreless draw with Marconi on a night rampant with scoring opportunities.

The ability to beat quality sides like South Melbourne then the next week lose to those below them has been the trademark stamped on their season.

But Sunday night they got it half right and turned in one of their better performances of recent weeks. The midfield play returned. Instead of using Dylan Macallister as a dart board the likes of Jonathon Richter, John Hutchinson and Wayne O'Sullivan returned to their probing best. The only thing that was still lacking was the finishing touch in-front of goal.

The Spirit had the best of both halves and the supporter faithfuls – who have entrenched themselves in the top right hand corner of the Pittwater Park grandstand – returned to full voice. The game put on display the next 'generation' of Australian soccer talent featuring 3 under 20 players in the Spirit's Alex Wilkinson, Jonathon Richter and Mark Milligan as well as Marconi defender Michael Thwaite.

Michael Turnbull shown saving a Dylan Macallister header during last week's match at Pittwater Park between the Spirit and Stallions.

Also on show was U/23's Alex Brosque and Dylan Macallister.

The healthy crowd of 2115 would have pleased organisers, with Marconi and the Spirit with their apparent new found financial backers looking like serious contenders for the two Sydney spots in next seasons league.

Spirit striker Dylan Macallister proved his selection in the Australian U/23 squad was justified by being a constant headache for the Stallion defenders.

Macallister had three tough chances to put the Spirit ahead in the latter stages of the first half and played a major role in the home sides other two chances.

Stallions shot stopper Michael Turnbull however proved up to the task, saving his clean sheet four times in the last 15 minutes.

For a player very much in the mould of Mark Viduka, Macallister's ability to turn sharply on the ball and hold it up for runners should make him part of any side in next years league.

If a goal was to come it seemed it would be out of the ordinary. Macallister watched his 22 yard volley just drop over the bar in the 53rd minute before Jonathan Richter almost crossed the ball into the Marconi net with 15 to go. Alex Brosque slashed wide minutes later before again being denied by Henderson with five minutes to go.

Stalwart defender Alex Tobin, who has been on the sidelines with a knee injury since round one this year made an appearance on the bench. His inclusion in the squad signalling that a return isn't too far away.

No Easy Task For Olyroos

The Olyroos expect a stern test when they open their 2004 Olympic qualifying preparation in a clash with Korea in Perth on Wednesday.

Coach Frank Farina has two friendly matches, against Korea, and against the Brisbane Strikers on June 10, to get his Australian Under-23 team ready for the Oceania region qualifying tournament starting on January 14.

The Aussies are favoured to win direct qualification to the Athens Olympics but both captain Ljubo Milicevic and coach Farina are guarding against complacency.

Australia is grouped with Samoa, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji in the 10-team tournament and is expected to contest the final against New Zealand for the sole qualifying spot.

"Our team has had a very limited preparation," said farina today.

"The big test for us is on January 14 (against Samoa) but these games are vital for us in terms of getting the team playing together as a unit.

"We may use different players at different times throughout the qualifying games because there are several games in just a few days.

"You're not just going to be relying on the same 11 players but our focus is solely on qualifying. We haven't qualified yet.

"This Korean side has probably played together about 20 or 30 times.

"You don't fluke making the World Cup semi-finals and this success will have flowed down to their under 23 side.

"It will be a strong test for us."

Farina said there was a good feeling in the Australian squad despite a couple of members remaining behind in Europe with their club side and not taking part in the tournament.

"This is the biggest tournament outside of the World Cup.

"It is a stepping stone for 2006.

"A lot of these boys will be pushing for senior selection. You just can't buy that experience."

Milicevic who is now playing in Switzerland said Australia had the talent to make a mark in Athens but they had to keep their mind on the job at hand.

"I am very confident in the boys and have no doubt we can qualify.

"We are pretty solid across the park. We don't want to get ahead of ourselves but at the same time if we do qualify, why not go for gold? Why not go for a medal?

"I'm not going to lie and say it would be easy but it is possible."

Milicevic said he developed a thicker skin since leaving Perth Glory to pursue his career in Switzerland and was honoured to be captaining the squad at such an important time.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I don't think the players realise just how big an Olympic games would be.

"If we do make it, it is up to us to do well at the Games and show everyone that Oceania is worthy of direct qualification at the World Cup."

Eight members of the 20-man Australian squad are based in Europe with the rest of the players members of the National Soccer League.

BYE - ADELAIDE UNITED

National Soccer League

After Round 17	TOTAL							PTS	HOME						AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	Bye	F	A		P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A
PERTH GLORY	14	10	1	3	2	33	15	31	4	4	0	0	14	1	10	6	1	3	19	14
PARRAMATTA POWER	16	9	2	4	1	34	15	29	7	5	1	1	22	4	8	4	1	3	12	11
SOUTH MELBOURNE	15	9	2	5	2	33	14	29	8	6	0	2	22	9	8	3	2	3	11	5
BRISBANE STRIKERS	16	7	5	4	1	20	20	26	8	5	3	0	13	6	8	2	2	4	7	14
SYDNEY UNITED	14	6	5	3	2	12	7	23	8	3	3	2	9	6	6	3	2	1	3	1
ADELAIDE UNITED	13	5	6	2	2	15	14	23	7	3	3	1	9	8	5	2	2	1	7	6
MARCONI STALLIONS	16	5	6	5	1	17	19	21	8	3	2	3	7	8	8	2	4	2	10	11
NEWCASTLE UTD	17	5	5	7	1	17	22	20	10	4	2	4	10	8	6	1	3	3	7	14
WOLLONGONG WOLVES	15	5	4	6	1	19	25	19	8	2	3	3	10	13	7	3	1	3	9	12
SYDNEY OLYMPIC	16	4	6	6	1	12	20	18	9	2	4	3	6	10	7	2	3	2	6	10
NORTHERN SPIRIT	16	5	2	9	1	22	24	17	8	3	2	3	16	12	8	2	0	6	6	12
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS	15	3	3	9	1	11	27	12	6	0	2	4	3	12	9	3	1	5	8	15
KINGZ	15	1	2	12	1	13	37	5	8	1	0	7	8	17	7	0	2	5	5	20

PARRAMATTA POWER 4
(T Dodd 57', S Petrovski 62', 84', A Milicic 71')

NEWCASTLE UNITED 0

Referee: Ben Williams. **Crowd:** 2,736.**Venue:** Parramatta Stadium.
Teams: PARRAMATTA POWER: Bolton, Colosimo (Sobczyk 85'), Beauchamp, Thompson, Dodd (Sekulovski 78'), Gumprecht, Milicic, Rech (Zorbas 46'), O'Grady, Petrovski, Elrich.
Subs Not Used: Vukovic (gk).

NEWCASTLE UNITED: Willis, Deans, Thomas (Prentice 74'), Wilson, R Griffiths, Johnson, Tsekenis (Thiessen 79'), Mitchell (McPherson 74'), Wheelhouse, Masi, Eagleton.
Subs Not Used: Kennedy (gk).
Cautions: A Elrich (PP) 93', P Tsekenis (NU) 25', J Wheelhouse (NU) 55', J Thiessen (NU) 93'.

BRISBANE STRIKERS 1
(P Grierson 79')

SOUTH MELBOURNE 0

Referee: Mark Shield. **Crowd:** 3,417.**Venue:** Perry Park.

Teams: BRISBANE STRIKERS: Higgins, Dodd, Stefanutto, McCloughan, McLaren, Grierson, Fitzsimmons (Scuderi 78'), Brownlie, Brain, Pilic (Rose 57'), McKay.
Subs Not Used: Heath, Watson (gk).
SOUTH MELBOURNE: Galekovic, Storey, Durakovic, Kovacevic, Coveny, Lia (Trimboli 86'), Laurie, Murdocca, Curcija (Boutsianis 69'), Sarkies, Tunbridge (Panopoulos 78').
Subs Not Used: Theoklitos (gk).
Cautions: K Dodd (BS) 44', R Brownlie (BS) 58', S Stefanutto (BS) 90', M Durakovic (SM) 59'.**Red Cards:** S Laurie (SM) 32'.

PERTH GLORY 4
(S Murphy 29', G Faria 56', N Mrdja 62', 78')

KINGZ 0

Referee: C. Diomis. **Crowd:** 9,856.**Venue:** MembersEquity Stadium.

Teams: PERTH GLORY: Petkovic, Bingley, Hassell (Caceres 72'), Murphy, Miller, Mrdja, Despotovski (Crampton 81'), North, Byrnes, Pondeljak (Danze 75'), Faria.
Subs Not Used: Matassa (gk).

KINGZ: Nicholson, Rayner, Tambouras, Jackson, Campbell, Ngata (Scott 75'), Rowley, Donoso, Schjerven (Collins 68'), Martin, Seaman (Christie 60').
Subs Not Used: Williams (gk).Cautions: Nil

SYDNEY UNITED 0
SYDNEY OLYMPIC 0

Referee: M. Breeze. **Crowd:** 3,462.**Venue:** Sydney United SC.

Teams: SYDNEY UNITED: Reddy, Haliti (M Santalab 76'), Cunico, Vrkic, Huxley, Parisi (B Santalab 54'), Babic, Collina, Rudan, Doumanis (Langdon 86'), Filipovic.
Subs Not Used: Necevski (gk).

SYDNEY OLYMPIC: Hughes, Souris, Kohler, Juric, Halpin, Bakis, Bojic (Baillie 77'), Baird (Cardozo 72'), Goutzioulis, Ishida (Schirripa 31'), Caravella.
Subs Not Used: Moss (gk).
Cautions: P Kohler (SO) 62', M Baird (SO) 69'. R
Red Cards: D Collina (SU) 83', P Cardozo (SO) 74'.

NORTHERN SPIRIT 0
MARCONI STALLIONS 0

Referee: Crowd: Venue: Pittwater Park.

Teams: NORTHERN SPIRIT: Henderson, O'Sullivan, Spencer, Tomasevic, Macallister, Richter (Kwasnik 83'), Hutchinson, Petrie (Fisher 85'), Wilkinson, Hunter, Milligan.
Subs Not Used: Tobin, Page (gk).

MARCONI STALLIONS: Turnbull, Bell, Casserly, Last, Gibson, Spiteri (Harris 61'), Maloney, Brosque, Thwaite, Carle, Renaud.
Subs Not Used: Webb, Brodie, Alogdellis (gk).
Cautions: J Richter (NS) 31', N Spencer (NS) 45', V Tomasevic (NS) 83', M Thwaite (MS) 46'.

WOLLONGONG WOLVES 1
(S Young 50' pen)

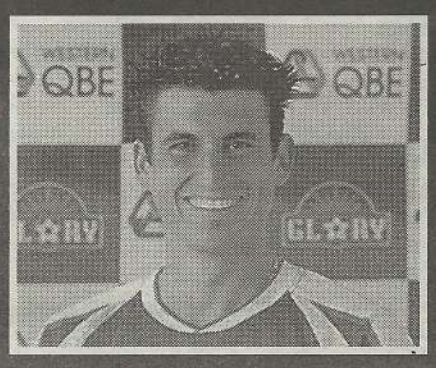
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS 1
(K Trajanovski 66')

Referee: Nathan Rice. **Crowd:** 3,211. **Venue:** WIN Stadium.

Teams: WOLLONGONG WOLVES: Crews, Dragas, Van Blerk, Hughes, Hawrysiuk (Wells 71'), Lyons, Arrarte, Young (Balabanel 87'), Cummins (Timpano 72'), Blake, Nwaogazi.
Subs Not Used: Arcaba (gk).
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS: Tomich, Zilic, R Vargas, Kovacic, Vasilevski, Buljan, Leijer, Natsioulas (Razov 46'), A Vargas, Pantelidis (Sabljak 78'), Trajanovski (Marinos 87').
Subs Not Used: Knezevic (gk).
Cautions: D Cummins (WW) 51', R Vargas (MK) 26'.

BYE - ADELAIDE UNITED

PLAYER OF THE WEEK



Nick Mrdja
(Perth Glory)

After sustaining a nasty head-clash during the start of the Glory v Kingz match last week, Perth marksman Nick Mrdja displayed that Damian Mori isn't the only striker in Western Australia.
The tricky striker bagged a double in Perth's four-nil thrashing of the Kingz and Mrdja grabbed the plaudits of being one of the best players of the match.
A player that has been left out due to the Mori and Bobby Despotovski partnership, Mrdja should well have taken the chance of gaining a start for last year's Champions.

Round 18	Round 19
Wed 7-1-04	Sat 10-1-04
*Parramatta Power vs Sydney United	Parramatta Power vs Marconi Stallions (Postponed)
*Melbourne Knights vs Kingz	*Perth Glory vs Sydney Olympic
*Perth Glory vs Northern Spirit	Sun 11-1-04
*Brisbane Strikers vs Adelaide United	*Kingz vs Wollongong
*Marconi Stallions vs Sydney Olympic (Match Postponed)	*Northern Spirit vs Melbourne Knights
Wollongong Wolves - Bye	*South Melbourne vs Sydney United
	*Adelaide Utd vs Newcastle
	Brisbane Strikers - Bye

LEADING GOALSCORERS

Name	Club	Total
MILICIC Ante	Parramatta	12
COVENY Vaughan	Sth Melbourne	10
CURCIJA Michael	South Melbourne	9
MORI Damian	Perth Glory	8
PETRIE Stewart	Northern Spirit	7
VEART Carl	Adelaide Utd *	7
PONDELJAK Tom	Perth Glory	6
DESPOTOVSKI Bobby	Perth Glory	6
NWAOGAZI Chima	Wollongong Wolves	6
DODD Travis	Parramatta Power	6

ENGLISH FA CUP

THE F.A. PREMIER LEAGUE

WATFORD 2
CHELSEA 2

Watford scored a disputed goal and tied Chelsea 2-2 in the third round of the FA Cup.

Watford took a 1-0 lead after just five minutes when Heidar Helguson's looping header dropped behind Chelsea goalkeeper Neil Sullivan. A TV replay showed the ball failed to cross the line but the referee awarded the goal.

Chelsea, the tournament favourite, equalised on 33 minutes thanks to Eidur Gudjohnsen's penalty kick however the hosts regained the lead a minute later on Gavin Mahon's header.

Chelsea tied it again in the 42nd minute as England midfielder Frank Lampard hit the net to set up a return match at Stamford Bridge.

KIDDERMINSTER 1
WOLVERHAMPTON 1

A late Alex Rae equaliser denied Third Division Kidderminster the chance to cause the shock of the FA Cup third round against Premiership strugglers Wolves.

Substitute John Williams was set to be the Harriers hero when he scored from close range in the 77th minute following Graham Ward's corner - just three minutes after coming on.

However, Rae was Wolves' saviour and scored his seventh of the season with a minute to go at Aggborough.

Kidderminster will have to console themselves with thoughts of a lucrative replay at Molineux.

GILLINGHAM 3
CHARLTON 2

Gillingham became the first team to eliminate a Premiership opponent as the Kent side came from behind to beat Charlton Athletic 3-2.

Charlton, pushing for a place in Europe, were ahead in the first minute with an Ian Cox own goal but found themselves trailing 3-1 at the break after goals by Tommy Johnson, Mamady Sidibe and Paul Smith -- the third a 25-yard screamer.

Gillingham, 15th in the first division, fully deserved their win but had to survive a late barrage during which Carlton Cole pulled one back for the London side.

CREWE 0
TELFORD UTD 1

One of the most eagerly-awaited days of the English season also featured another giant-killing performance for minor league Telford United, who claimed their 13th Football League scalp by beating first division Crewe Alexandra 1-0 away at Gresty Road.

Veteran striker Lee Mills scored the early winner for the Shropshire side, who reached the fifth round in 1985 before losing to eventual winners Everton.

EVERTON 3
NORWICH 1

Two fouls by Iwan Roberts on Alan Stubbs in the box condemned First Division leaders Norwich to a 3-1 defeat to Everton at Goodison Park.

The Canaries fell behind to a Kevin Kilbane header but Jim Brennan equalised in the 27th minute when the Toffees failed to clear a Paul McVeigh free-kick.

Nigel Worthington's men then had a goal disallowed for offside before Roberts twice fouled Stubbs in the area, once in each half, with Duncan Ferguson scoring from the spot each time.

TOTTENHAM 3
CRYSTAL PALACE 0

Frederic Kanoute shrugged off his club-versus-country worries with a hat-trick to book Tottenham's passage to the fourth round with a 3-0 win over Crystal Palace.

The striker is wanted by Mali for the African Nations Cup later this month and he scored with a well-worked finish in the 15th minute to demonstrate why Spurs boss David Pleat is equally keen to keep him in north London.

Kanoute netted his second five minutes later after Stephane Dalmat laid a chance on a plate for him after a fantastic run.

His third arrived three minutes into the second half when he escaped the Eagles defence to sidefoot the ball past Cedric Berthelin.

MANCHESTER CITY 2
LEICESTER 2

The all-Premiership clash between Manchester City and Leicester ended 2-2 at the City of Manchester Stadium.

Former City striker Paul Dickov hit the target for the Foxes after three minutes but French striker Nicolas Anelka held his nerve to equalise with a 27th-minute penalty.

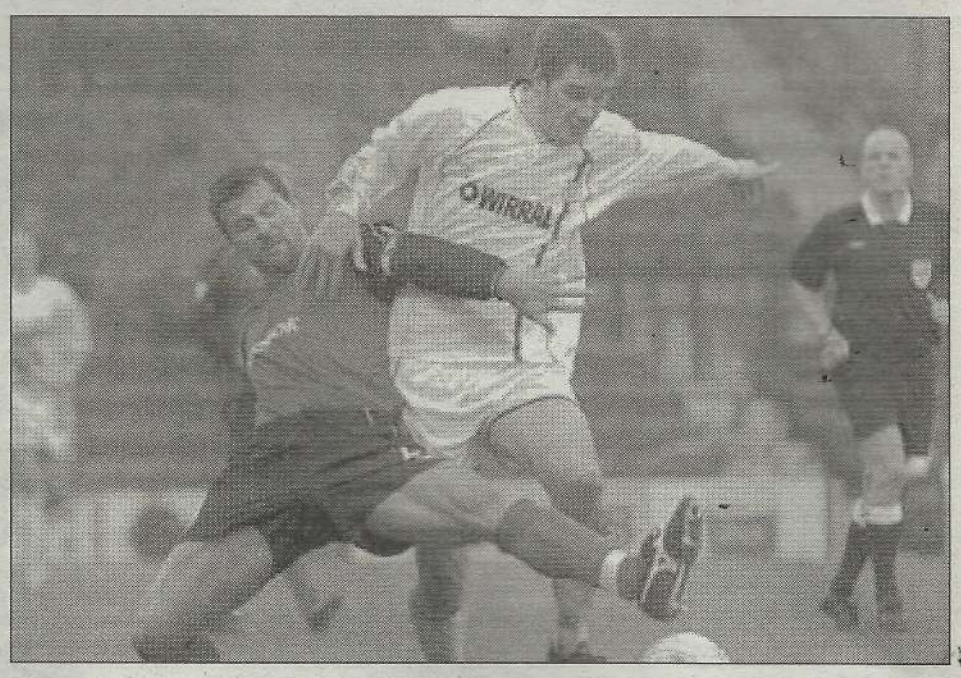
Hesitancy from Richard Dunne allowed Marcus Bent to score a soft goal for Leicester (66) but Anelka netted a quickfire equaliser.

BIRMINGHAM 4
BLACKBURN 0

Birmingham gained sweet revenge for their recent Premiership mauling by Blackburn as they cruised into the fourth round of the FA Cup.

Goals from Clinton Morrison, Stephen Clemence, Mikael Forssell and Bryan Hughes helped Blues wipe out the memory of the 4-0 defeat on the same ground last month.

But it came at a price as Matthew Upson, Stan Lazaridis and David Dunn all had to be substituted through injury.



Bolton's Emerson Thome (left) challenges Tranmere's Simon Howarth during their English FA Cup Third Round match at Tranmere's Prenton Park.

SOUTHAMPTON 0
NEWCASTLE UTD 3

Two goals from Kieron Dyer inspired a superb 3-0 victory for Newcastle at Southampton. The England midfielder lashed home a half-volley to open the scoring midway through the first half and added a brilliant third after a weaving run past two Saints defenders in the second half.

Laurent Robert had provided the other goal just before the interval with a trademark rasping drive after Southampton only partially cleared a corner.

MIDDLESBROUGH 2
NOTTS COUNTY 0

Middlesbrough's five-match goal drought at the Riverside Stadium ended in their 2-0 victory but they needed a helping hand - or leg rather - from Notts County.

A 473-minute barren spell dating back to November 1 ended midway through the first half when Joseph-Desire Job's cross-shot was diverted past Steve Mildenhall by County's Ian Richardson.

Things got even worse for the visitors when captain Tony Barras hauled down Michael Ricketts and was sent off just after the half-hour.

On-loan Chelsea midfielder Bolo Zenden eased Boro's passage to the next round with a 63rd-minute volley.

ASTON VILLA 1
MANCHESTER UTD 2

Manchester United came from behind to beat Aston Villa 2-1 with second-half goals from Paul Scholes after Gareth Barry had given Villa an early lead.

Villa began confidently and defender Barry scored after 19 minutes when his shot was deflected off defender Wes Brown.

Alex Ferguson started with top scorer Ruud van Nistelrooy and captain Roy Keane on the bench but he brought on his two key players early in the second half and soon after United levelled when Scholes tapped in a cross from Ryan Giggs.

The England midfielder doubled his tally four minutes later, again blasting in from a Giggs cross.

LEEDS UTD 1
ARSENAL 4

Holders Arsenal recovered from an early mistake by goalkeeper Jens Lehmann to thrash Leeds United 4-1 at Elland Road.

Mark Viduka gave Leeds an eighth-minute lead after an embarrassing error from Lehmann, whose attempted clearance after a back pass from Sol Campbell was charged down by the Australian striker into the net.

Arsenal, attempting to win the Cup for the third time in a row, quickly regained their composure and Thierry Henry equalised in the 26th minute, before the France striker was also involved in Arsenal's second and third goals.

His pinpoint cross was met by Brazilian Edu in the 33rd minute and a pass to Robert Pires three minutes from time allowed the midfielder to drill in from the centre of the area.

Pires then crossed for Kolo Toure to score Arsenal's fourth in the dying seconds.

YEOVIL 0
LIVERPOOL 2

Liverpool avoided an embarrassing early exit when they scraped a 2-0 win at lowly Yeovil. Renowned giant-killers Yeovil of the third division held out for 70 minutes against Liverpool but Emile Heskey preserved the premier league side's dignity when he scored with a right-footed shot from the edge of the area.

Danny Murphy made it two seven minutes later when he coolly converted from the penalty spot after striker Harry Kewell had been brought down inside the box.

Third Division Kidderminster celebrate John Williams' goal against Premier League side Wolverhampton.

FIXTURES

Saturday 10th January

Arsenal	v	Middlesbrough
Birmingham	v	Southampton
Blackburn	v	Bolton
Charlton	v	Wolverhampton
Fulham	v	Everton
Leeds	v	Tottenham
Leicester	v	Chelsea
Liverpool	v	Aston Villa
Man Utd	v	Newcastle
Portsmouth	v	Man City

Accrington Stanley 0 Colchester 0, Barnsley 0 Scunthorpe 0, Birmingham City 4 Blackburn 0, Bradford 1 Luton 2, Cardiff 0 Sheffield Utd 1, Coventry 2 Peterborough 1, Crewe 0 Telford 1, Everton 3 Norwich 1, Gillingham 3 Charlton 2, Ipswich 3 Derby 0, Kidderminster 1 Wolverhampton 1, Manchester City 2 Leicester City 2, Mansfield 0 Burnley 2, Middlesbrough 2 Notts County 0, Millwall 2 Walsall 1, Northampton 1 Rotherham 1, Nottingham Forest 1 West Bromwich 0, Portsmouth 2 Blackpool 1, Preston 3 Reading 3, Southampton 0 Newcastle Utd 3, Southend 1 Scarborough 1, Sunderland 1 Hartlepool 0, Swansea 2 Macclesfield 1, Tottenham 3 Crystal Palace 0, Tranmere 1 Bolton Wanderers 1, Watford 2 Chelsea 2, Wigan 1 West Ham 2, Wimbledon 1 Stoke 1, Aston Villa 1 Manchester Utd 2, Fulham 2 Cheltenham 1, Leeds Utd 1 Arsenal 4, Yeovil 0 Liverpool 2.

Third Round Replay Dates

Wednesday, January 14 (AEDT)

Bolton Wanderers vs Tranmere, Colchester vs Accrington Stanley, Reading vs Preston, Rotherham vs Northampton, Scunthorpe vs Barnsley, Stoke vs Wimbledon, Wolverhampton vs Kidderminster.

Thursday, January 15 (AEDT)

Chelsea vs Watford, Leicester City vs Manchester City, Scarborough vs Southend.

C M Y K

Spanish Primera Liga

Real Madrid eked out a 1-0 victory at home to Murcia to stretch their lead at the top in Spain.

Real showed obvious signs of rustiness on their return from the festive break and were never completely comfortable, despite taking the lead in the ninth minute with a tap-in from Raul.

Murcia missed several clear chances early in the second half and Luis Garcia hit the bar with a free kick five minutes from time but Real held on for a fifth straight league win.

Valencia kept up the pressure on Real Madrid by coming from behind to defeat Villarreal 4-2 at the Mestalla.

Quick-fire second-half goals from Rubén Baraja and Pablo Aimar gave Valencia all three points after Juan Riquelme had given UEFA Cup hopefuls Villarreal the lead.

Once Villarreal's Sergio Ballesteros was sent off and Baraja's second stretched the lead to 3-1 it seemed Valencia would coast to victory, but Juliano Belletti's 78th-minute effort ensured a nervous spell until Miguel Angulo restored the two-goal cushion at the death.

Third-placed Deportivo Coruna stayed within striking distance of the leaders following a 5-0 victory away to their hapless Galician rivals Celta Vigo.

Albert Luque and Victor scored on the counter-attack to make it 2-0 at half-time and Victor completed his hat-trick after the break, his third coming from a dreadful mistake from Celta keeper Pablo Cavallero. Diego Tristan bagged the fifth late on.

Victory for Depor gave them 36 points from 18 games and took them eight points ahead of Atletico Madrid, who had to settle for a goalless draw away to Real Zaragoza.

Atletico were hoping to move three points clear in the fourth Champions League place but were forced to settle for a point in a game of few chances.

Barcelona continued their slide into mid-table obscurity after slumping to a 3-0 defeat away to a lively Racing Santander, who took full advantage of some nervous keeping by Turkish international Rustu Recber.

The first goal arrived after Rustu spilled a bobbling free kick from Mario Regueiro on 52 minutes and Racing defender Juanma was on hand to poke home from close range.

Xavi and Ronaldinho missed good chances to level the game midway through the half, but it was Racing who ended up scoring again thanks to a brilliant solo effort from Regueiro 10 minutes from time.

Striker Javi Guerrero delivered the final blow, powering home a close-range header four minutes later.

Espanyol started 2004 in the most encouraging fashion by recording only their third win of the season, a 2-0 defeat of Real Mallorca.

Even though the precious victory still leaves them anchored at the bottom of the ladder, one point behind Murcia, the authoritative quality of the performance and Raul Tamudo's two goals offer real hope of escaping the drop.

Albacete slumped to their seventh defeat in nine away games in the Primera Liga as Sevilla cruised to 1 2-0 victory at the Sanchez Pizjuan stadium.

The visitors have struggled on their travels this season and their cause was hardly helped by the dismissal of Miguel Buades for violent conduct after 36 minutes.

Sevilla took full advantage by taking the lead three minutes later through Cesar Julio Baptista.

Albacete were reduced to nine men late on when Carlos Aranda was sent off after picking up two yellow cards and Ramiro Antonito secured the win with Sevilla's second in the final minute.

Honours were shared in the Basque derby as Bilbao and Osasuna were forced to settle for a point.

Osasuna, fifth before the start of play, took the lead after 36 minutes through Jose Izquierdo and looked to be heading for their third away victory in the league this season.

But Asier Del Horno equalised on the stroke of half-time to register Athletic's first draw at home in La Liga this season.

Struggling Real Betis earned a 0-0 draw at Real Valladolid.

Oscar Gonzalez hit a post for Valladolid but after that Betis had the better of the chances.

Joaquin Sanchez was the chief tormentor but Betis could not find the goal that would hand them a vital victory.

Real Sociedad earned a vital 1-2 win that eased their relegation fears against Malaga.

Sociedad had fallen behind to a Carlos Litos goal but fought back with a Valeri Karpin equaliser.

It was Nihat Kahveci who was the hero though as he scored Sociedad's match winner just before half-time.

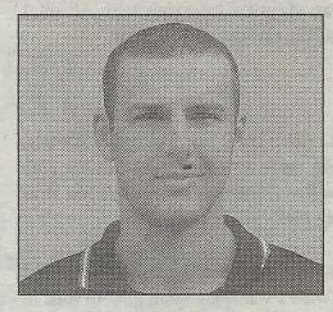
Real Madrid's David Beckham (right) tries to get past Real Murcia's Jose Luis Acciari.

Come and Watch High Flying Parramatta Power Take On Cross-Town Rivals Sydney United

Clint Bolton

Ante Milicic

Liam Reddy



Joe Vrkic

Saso Petrovski

on

Wednesday 7th January

Kick-Off at 7.30pm

Parramatta Stadium

Anthony Doumanis

THE 'REAL' NED ZELIC STORY

By Daniela Raco

Former Clubs

Sydney United, UTS Olympic, Borussia Dortmund (Germany), Queens Park Rangers (England), Auxerre (France), Eintracht Frankfurt, TSV 1860 Munich (Germany), Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan).

NED ZELIC was the marquee player of his generation. At 32, he has the look of a player still in his prime. He has the wisdom and maturity acquired with over 10 years in European football.

Zelic was a player who saved the best for his country. His wonder goal that took the Olyroos to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics rates as the greatest moment of individual genius ever seen in the green and gold. Zelic was an instant pin-up boy and the subject of offers from huge European clubs. Regrettably it seems one of the greatest Socceroo players of the modern era won't be seen in Australia's colours again. The elegant playmakers international career is all over.

Zelic's self-imposed exile from the National team continues to be a major talking point "Down Under". The Socceroos are potentially a great side without him, but a team of boundless possibilities with him.

There are many facets to this man. Ned Zelic is a "top bloke". He is content with who he is, and with all that he is about.

In an exclusive interview with *ABSW*, I look at the enigma of Ned Zelic.

DR: After close to 10 years in Europe, was the move to Japanese J-League club Urawa Red Diamonds the change you were looking for?

Yes, because it was a drastic change and that's what I wanted. I spent a lot of time in Europe and with my last club I felt that my stay there was exhausted. Japan was a place that I was always interested in.

That's what made me go there, for something completely different; that puts me in a situation where I have to learn a new language to socially settle in and live there.

DR: Did you have any intention of returning to Europe after your stint in Japan?

I left Germany to go to Japan, and I've spent a year and a half there now. I don't know if I'll go back there. That's not a decision I've made yet. As for Europe, that will always be interesting to any sort of player. I don't think it matters how old you are. For me, it depends on whose coach, what team, where you're going to be living and all the rest. These are the decisions I have to weigh up.

DR: Was the Japanese game suited to your style of play?

I didn't have too many problems settling in to their style of play. It's a very quick game they play over there. I have always been blessed with speed. It wasn't too difficult settling into a game situation. I just had a few problems at the start with a few injuries. Luckily this season (2003), I had a good run, and a successful run with the team.

DR: Are you enjoying the game at the moment?

Obviously there have been times where I've woken up in the morning and thought "Ohh no, not again", but I think they're the sorts of phases that are normal in every persons life, not just a soccer player. Generally if you're fit, and your team is doing well, you enjoy the game. Success plays a big part in that. If you are having success, then you are going to enjoy yourself.

At the same time that doesn't mean if things are not going well on or off the park that you hate it, that's not the case. There are situations when you're injured and have to go through the rehabilitation to get back that you think to yourself "Not again". But, to answer the question ... I am enjoying the game.

DR: You have enjoyed success in the J-League, after having had a peripatetic career in Germany, France, and, briefly, England. What are some of the highlights looking back on such a glittering career?

At club level there was my first season when I joined Borussia Dortmund in 1992 after the Olympics. We had a great run that season and got to the UEFA Cup final. That was a highlight, getting to the final of such a major event in my first season in Europe. Then of course facing Juventus Turin with guys like Roberto Baggio, Jurgen Kohler and the rest, just to name a few was a highlight.

Winning the Japanese Cup in November of this year was a big highlight. As well as winning the Bundesliga Title back in 1995 at club level. At 1860 Munich we had a great run in the year 2000 where no one expected us to go so far and we finished up 4th and we qualified for the Champions League.

We didn't actually make it into the group stages, but to get that far with that club was a big highlight. Obviously at international level with Australia. I don't have to mention the Holland game and qualifying for Barcelona was a huge highlight. Playing against Diego Maradona back then against Argentina was a highlight. Getting to the Confederations Cup final in Saudi Arabia; we got thumped in the final but it was still an achievement to get there. There are so many highlights, but these are the ones that stick out the most in my mind.

DR: I understand there is a funny story about how you and a handful of players lost your Cup winning medals. Do tell...

It involved me and another Brazilian guy. After the final a whole group of our spectators ran onto the pitch while we were doing our lap of honour.

They were jumping all over us and ended up somehow snatching our medals from around our necks and took off with them. When it got out into the press, hundreds of supporters would come to training and there were kids with replacement medals made out of paper and I ended up with about a hundred of these medals made by these kids.

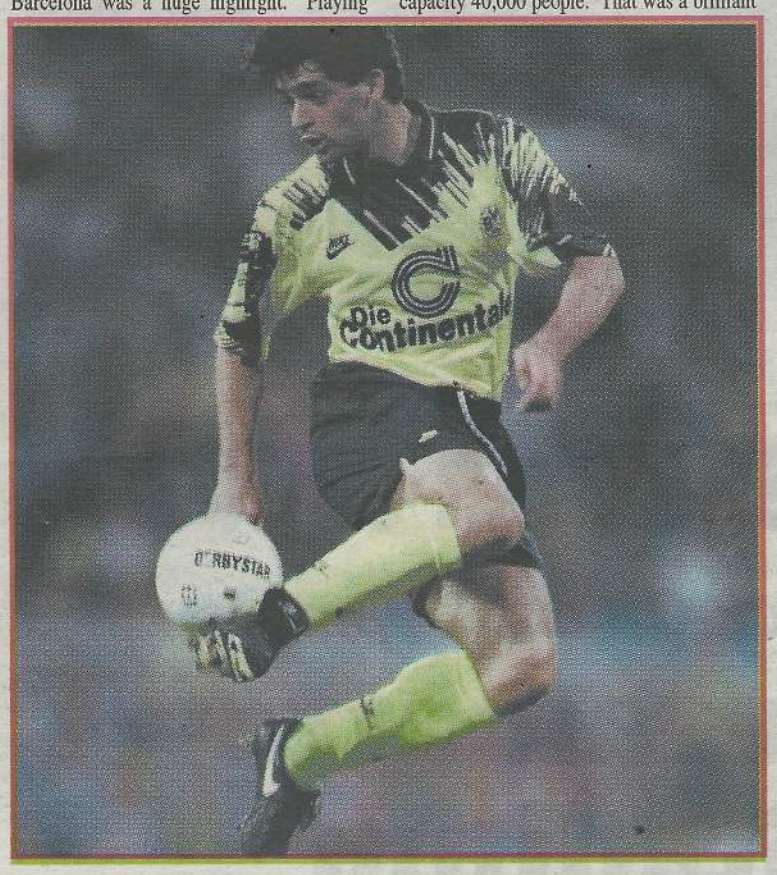
They were feeling so bad that something like this had happened. I was given a massive red banner with thousands of signatures saying how sorry they were that my medal was taken.

Obviously I would have liked to have kept the medal but at the end of the day these people were feeling a lot worse off than I was. Luckily, I was given a replacement from the Japanese Federation so it all worked out well.

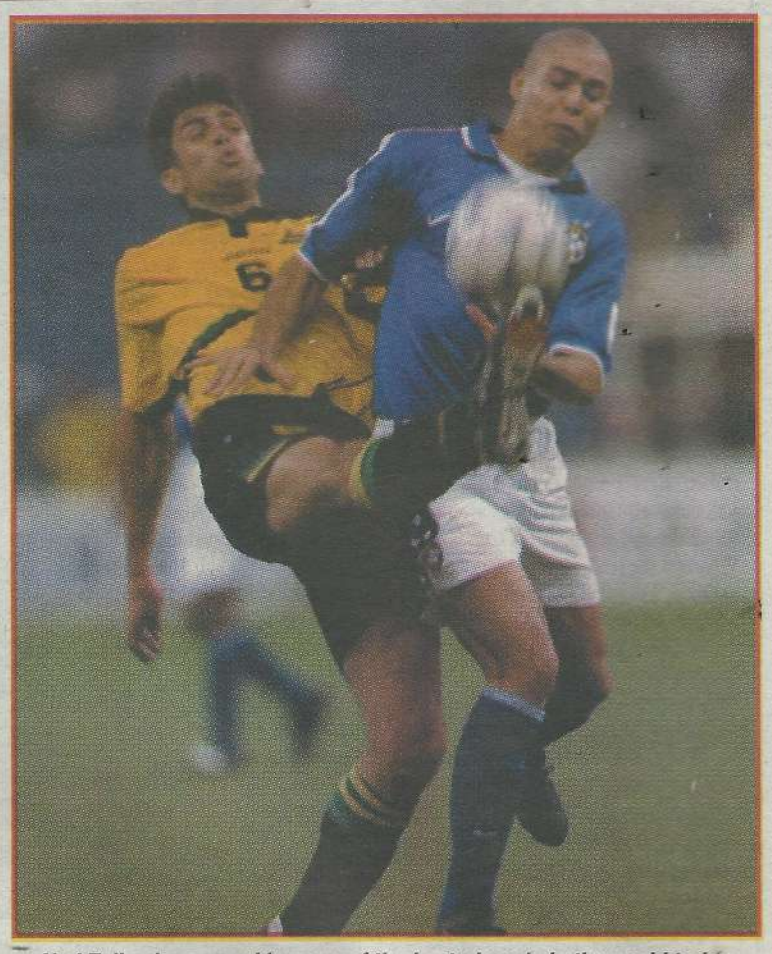
DR: You have been playing overseas since leaving Sydney Olympic 11 years ago. Can you remember your debut in Europe for Borussia Dortmund?

I joined the club just after the Olympics. I actually thought I was going to make my debut a couple of days later because I had arrived on the Wednesday before the actual start of the Bundesliga and the coach put me on the bench for that first game and basically told me at half time that I was going on, so here I am at half time warming up, doing all my doggies on the field and all the rest thinking I am going to go on, then at the last second I was told by the co-trainer that one of the other players had an injury worry and he had to put another player on.

I didn't really care because it was only two or three days after arriving at the club. I was lucky to get a start two weeks later against Kaiserslautern at home in front of a capacity 40,000 people. That was a brilliant way to make my debut. We won 1-0 and it made my day.



Known for his sweet touch, Zelic shown in his Borussia Dortmund days where he took the Bundesliga by storm.



Ned Zelic shown marking one of the best player's in the world today, Brazilian ace Ronaldo in Saudi Arabia.

DR: Who is the most interesting character you've ever come across in all your years abroad?

I'd have to say the Brazilian Julio Cesar whom I'd played with at Dortmund. This guy was unbelievable. He would ignore every rule a club would give their players. He was consistent in not turning up to training on time.

He'd wear the best suits by Armani or Versace and come to training dressed up like he was going to a cocktail party.

I never saw him in jeans or tracksuit pants. He was setting the style for the other boys in the change rooms.

He was such an interesting man as well, and we actually turned into such good friends.

Back then, before I met my wife, he and I were dating two girls that were close friends.

We went out on double dates quite a few times, so I really got to know him quite well. He was definitely one of the most interesting guys I ever met in football.

He was a professional on the field, but off the field he did what he wanted. Obviously there has to be rules, but what it comes down to in soccer is performance on the field, and he performed all the time.

DR: Is club football your number one priority now?

It is always a difficult decision to make. I remember when I was faced with the decision Club vs. Country back during the qualifiers with Argentina.

The coach of Borussia Dortmund at the time said to me "Look I think it would be better if you quit the National team and stay here and concentrate on club football".

Obviously it would have been a difficult decision for me to come out and say I wasn't coming home and playing against Argentina. If I made that decision, I wouldn't have been happy with it. I would have copped a lot of flak but that was at the back of my mind.

In the past I have always made decisions and didn't really care what people thought about them, if they liked them or didn't. First and foremost, I wasn't ready back then to put club before country.

With what happened when I came back for the Brazil series when Frank Farina was coach, I definitely experienced that sometimes it is better to put club before country.

To come back and be put on the bench, I was in a lose/lose situation. I wasn't playing for my country, and was putting my spot at risk with my club. Situations like that, I think it is better just to stick with club football.

DR: What do you make of the quote "a tactician adjusts his tactics to suit the players, not changes the players to suit the tactics"?

I think that's spot on. That's a great quote. I think there are too many coaches around these days that have their tactics set out in their head regardless of what sort of players they've got.

DR: You are still young enough to figure in 2006, has all hope of a comeback been lost?

A comeback isn't even in the back of my mind. I'm basically faced with the situation that's at hand now, and can tell you that there's no way I'll be making a comeback under present circumstances. I'm not even thinking that far ahead.

It's how it is now. Obviously down the track things could change. They always do in soccer. It's an unpredictable game. But as for now, there's nothing brewing.

DR: With the World Cup looming in Germany in 2006, a country where you spent so much of your career, is this added incentive for you to give the Would Cup another shot?

It was definitely something I thought about. I did spend a lot of time there so obviously I know a lot of people, all the stadiums, and all the rest. But, it's not something that would make me come out and say I've got to make a comeback because the World Cup is in Germany.

I have to be comfortable with the situation at home with the National team. Things have to be sorted out there, first and foremost.

THE 'REAL' NED ZELIC STORY

DR: Did you have the full support of Socceroo coach Frank Farina?

No, not at all. For me that's not support. Bringing me out and not playing me is not support. Frank himself knew how difficult it was to get away from clubs when he was overseas. That's why his decision more or less surprised me, to leave me out back then. But that was his decision. He makes them. But I'm entitled to make decisions on my own as a player and that's what I did back then.

DR: Do you have any regrets?
Not for one second. No.

DR: What will it take for Australia to be World Soccer Champions?

I think you need the majority of the team to actually be considered world class players. Obviously we have guys like Kewell and Viduka, but even those guys I don't think have risen into the category of say a Zinadane Zidane, or Thierry Henry. I think we need guys to push into that category for us to have a shot at winning a World Cup final.

DR: For an athlete to truly find out how good they are, they need to perform with and against the best. Which players have you come up against that you consider the best?

I'd have to say Diego Maradona. I've always considered him "the best". Roberto Baggio wiped us out in the UEFA Cup final with Borussia Dortmund. He was definitely in a class of his own back then. I left the pitch thinking this guy is just a legend. I think the same with Maradona.

Even though he didn't score a hat-trick against us or mesmerize us when we played Argentina in 1993, I remember the first game; I was injured for the second, just his little deft touches on the field. Being so close and seeing that made it even more special. These two guys stand out. Even Ronaldo in the Confederations Cup final in 1997 in Saudi Arabia, he really taught us a lesson that day.

DR: Do you enjoy the big stage?

Yes, of course. I enjoy playing against big teams and players with big reputations. That makes the game even more enjoyable than it already is; when you come up against guys like that.

DR: What has been your best year in the game?

I'd have to say 1992. That year everything fell into place with regards to club football (Borussia Dortmund), and the Olympic Games team as well. In 1998 with my club, 1860 Munich, that was a standout year. The year 2000 and 2003 as well. If I had to name one year… I couldn't… I'd have to name two…'92, and '98 were definitely standout years.

DR: Injuries hampered your career moves over the years. Any niggling worries at the moment?

There are always little things, but I'm lucky there haven't been big injuries like the knee injuries that I had in 1996 with Auxerre in France and 1994 with Dortmund. I've been lucky in recent years that I haven't had any major surgery. Obviously there are muscle tears and other things that have happened, but nothing really serious.

DR: Do you still get a tinkle down your spine when you watch a tape of "that goal"?

It's funny that you should ask that, because I've watched that game only once in full. That was in January of this year when I came home for holidays. I pulled it out and watched the whole 120 minutes of it. I had never actually put a tape in to watch "that goal".

I've always been like that. I've never liked to watch my own games, because even if I've had a really good game, I know that there are little things that I haven't been happy with. I'm really self-critical. I'd walk off pissed-off thinking about these two or three bad things. And, obviously I'm not going to watch my bad games that's for sure.

DR: What does Ned Zelic like to do with himself in the off-season?

I like to play a lot of golf. I like to play cricket in the driveway. Basically sporty things. A lot of bike-riding with my daughter. I also like to go out for a drink and relax, go to a disco or a bar. I'm into Rugby League as well; it's just unfortunate I can't watch it because I only come back here in the summer. I'd love the opportunity to watch a live game.

DR: Your brother Ivan is also a professional soccer player. Have you had the opportunity to watch him play over the years?

Not as much as I would have liked to. Obviously with us being brothers and growing up together we played a lot of soccer out in the front yard, but once I went overseas it was a different scenario. I'd come back for three or four weeks and we'd catch up, but it was something different to what we were used to and seeing each other everyday. Obviously I track his career, but I really haven't seen a lot of games.

DR: You are the star target for the Melbourne United consortium as it bids to join the new Premier League. Can you be convinced to make the move?

That's so far down the track. Obviously I want to come back to Australia one day and maybe play a season or two to finish off my career. I'm such an unpredictable person sometimes that I basically can't make decisions that are too long term. It is something that would interest me down the track for sure, but who knows where I'll be in a years time. We'll see once it gets a bit closer to kick-off what I'm doing, if I'm interested, and then we can take it from there.

DR: Is the game moving in the right direction?

Definitely. I think this is something that was needed. I think the game was going nowhere. It needed some sort of change to inject a bit of interest. As you can see now, the media is concentrating on what's developing and what's going to be happening in the future. It's brought a lot of interest back into the game.

DR: Would you like to see a new Canberra team join the proposed Australian premier league?

It would be a special thing for me if my hometown was involved in the league. As for now, from what I've heard, it's definitely a difficult proposition, but something I would endorse and help out where I could. I personally haven't heard anything or anyone brainstorming here in Canberra to get something together.

DR: Where to from here? What's your next move?

That's a good question, because I don't know myself. I've finished up in Japan, and don't think I'll be going back there. At the moment I'm here holidaying and enjoying just being here. I didn't want to come back and think too much about what's my next step because then it wouldn't be a holiday. First I want to relax my mind, then after the festivities and the new year is over I'll make a decision on what I'm going to do and where I'm going to go. I've got a few options at the moment, but I don't want to make any decisions.

DR: Do you have any plans for the after-life (retirement)?

I'll be 33 next July, and obviously people will say that you can play another two or three years, but when you get to this age you can't plan too far ahead and it could be over whenever. I have thought about what I want to do when it's over, and there are a few things I am interested in.

Coaching is an option, but there are other things that can keep me involved in soccer without actually having to get out on the touchline and yell at people. So I might explore those avenues. I think it will be a quick decision once my career is over because I'm not the type to hang around and do nothing.

Next Week: Daniela Raco takes out a mad-minute interview with Ned Zelic

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EUROPE CAN WAIT - BROSQUE

By Luke Doherty

It may be a while before Marconi's 20 year old striker Alex Brosque is sprawled out on an advertising board above your nearest freeway - wielding a Pepsi like his footballing twin Harry Kewell - but one thing that is for sure is that Brosque will be Australian soccer's next big export.

The Young Socceroo fell under the watchful eyes of European talent scouts from Liverpool and Middlesborough at the recent under 20 world championships in Dubai and if all goes to plan Brosque will follow on as part of a select line of Aussie footballers who have been poached from the National League by European clubs.

Mark Viduka started the exodus before Harry Kewell said goodbye in 1995, Brett Emerton and Lucas Neill followed suit — getting snapped up by Feyenoord and Millwall before both being bought by Blackburn Rovers — and if the reports are right 2004 could see the departure of Brosque.

Middlesborough manager Steve McClaren is showing the most interest in the youngster so far and he is likely to post a Sydney-based scout to track Brosque for the rest of the NSL season.

But the 20 year old says he doesn't believe the hype just yet.

"I can't really believe it." Brosque said.

"I saw the things about Middlesborough on the internet."

"I'm a bit nervous about it but it's great to be noticed by clubs like that."

He was named 2002/03 NSL young player of the year and since joining Marconi after going through the AIS academy has gone onto collect 9 caps for the young Socceroos.

Rarely has an under 20's player, who is still in the NSL, generated so much publicity.

Despite the calls for him to leave when the European January transfer window opens in January Brosque remains committed to the Stallions.

When Brosque and his young Socceroo team mate Michael Thwaite arrived back from the under 20 world championships in the UAE 2 weeks ago, he received a call from Marconi coach Jean Paul De-Marigny asking him to play for the Stallions that night.

Without hesitation, Brosque shrugged aside his obvious jet lag to come off the bench in the Stallions narrow 1-nil loss to the Melbourne Knights.

Alex Brosque: Sky's the limit for the Stallions striker.

This is the temperament that has made him a champion but Brosque says that although he is aware of how his reputation has grown over the past 2 months he knows that his so called 'luck' could end as quickly as it was generated.

"Nothing 100% has been said yet [about whether Marconi will be in the league next year]"

"I would definitely think about going overseas but it would have to be worth going."

At the recent 'launching' of the blue print for the new 10 team competition next year, Australian Soccer Association chairman Frank Lowy sat before a host of reporters on the 23rd level of his Westfield Towers office and said that he hopes that the new league will encourage Australia's talent to stay in Australia instead of going overseas.

With Marconi looking like the only Sydney club with deep enough pockets to launch a financially viable side into the temporarily named Australian Premier League, Brosque could have the chance to stay at home and earn enough to live as a professional footballer.

Whatever the case every effort should be made by Marconi to retain a player of Brosque's quality but he says that money wont be the deciding factor behind his decision to go or stay when the inevitable contract offers start flying in early next year.

"Money isn't really playing a part in my decision."

"If an overseas contact did come in then it would have to be the right club, the right country and the right lifestyle."

"There is a lot of hype surrounding the new league so it would be great to be part of that as well."

He is in his second year as a Marconi player and although he has had a disrupted start to the season because of the under 20 tournament he has already developed a cult following amongst the Marconi faithful.

The future is exciting not only for Brosque but also the Australian national team. This current batch of young Socceroos are the best collective group that the national team has had for a while.

Brosque, as well as the likes of Alex Wilkinson (Nth Spirit), Nathan Coe (Inter Milan Youth), Carl Valeri (Inter Milan Youth) Scott MacDonald and Massimo Murdocca (Sth Melbourne) are tipped to figure in national coach Frank Farina's plans for the Under 23 Olympic qualifiers next month.

"The squad gets named later this week so fingers crossed."

"I'll hopefully be a part of it but I'm pretty confident."

Dad defends Son over Olyroos

By Brett Klucznik

Armadale born Brad Jones has turned down an offer to join the Australian Under-23 squad for the up-coming Olympic Games qualifiers.

The 21-year old goalkeeper found himself between a rock and a hard place when called-up by national coach Frank Farina earlier in the month.

With his contract set to expire at the end of the season Jones has been discussing his playing future with the Middlesbrough hierarchy.

"It really was a very difficult situation for Brad," explained his father, Ian Jones.

"He's at this time talking with the club about a new contract and he really couldn't walk away from the negotiations at this stage. On top of that Boro's second choice 'keeper, Carlo Nash, is out for the rest of the season through injury and Brad has stepped into his place. So you can see his dilemma - it didn't matter which way the boy went, he was going to let somebody down."

"When I spoke to Brad last night he was very upset at having to pull out of the Under-23 squad," added Jones.

"He desperately wants to play for his country at the Olympics, it's been his dream since he was knee high. But at this stage he can't take the chance of coming over here and playing in the qualifiers then returning to England to find he's without a club for next season.

"Brad had a good meeting with Boro manager Steve McLaren a couple of days ago and following that he is confident he will be staying with the club next season, but nothing is signed and anything can still happen. McLaren has also spoken to Frank Farina and explained the situation so hopefully Brad will still be in the running to be selected for the Olympic squad later on in the year."

Kosmina takes a break

The hectic start to Adelaide United's National Soccer League life has taken its toll on the players according to coach John Kosmina.

After Adelaide Force withdrew from the League, United was hastily put together to take its place, meaning the club's inaugural season started four weeks late with the extra games to be squeezed in during the season.

With that in mind, Kosmina has decided to give his players their first extended break so they can capitalise on their terrific start to the season which sees them in fourth at New Year's Day. With the club's only bye for the season last week, Kosmina told ABC Online that he wants to keep his players fresh for a finals campaign.

Adelaide United coach John Kosmina.

"We've got 11 games, let's try to set a target of winning six of those, now if we win six of those we're going to have 41 points up our sleeve and that'll definitely get us into the six," he said.

"We're good enough to win the six to be honest, we've played every team in the league."

FARINA CONFIDENT SQUAD WILL GET THE JOB DONE

Australian Under 23 coach Frank Farina is confident the squad chosen for the OFC Men's Olympic Qualifying Tournament will get the job done in January and qualify the team for the 2004 Athens games.

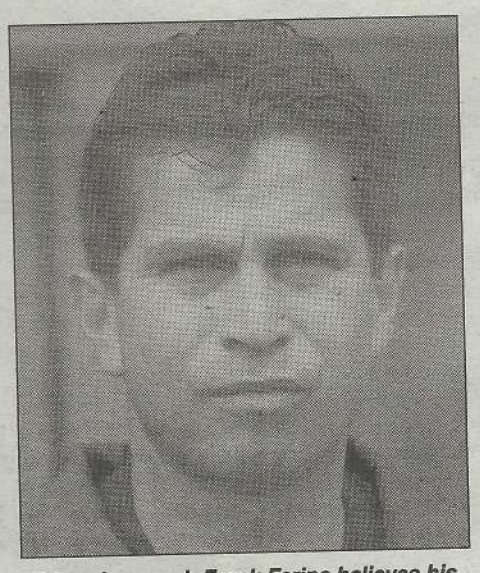
Farina chose a 20-man squad for the two-week tournament that starts on January 14, and included five players from the Under 20 team that competed at the recent World Youth Championships in the United Arab Emirates.

"I am very happy with the squad", said Farina via a media telephone hook-up. "It is very evenly balanced, if you look from the back right through to the frontline players.

"Unfortunately you can only select 20 and I believe the squad we've got here is very good and will do the job for us."

"I think there is depth in all the positions whether you talk defence, midfield and attack, and it is going to be a fight in all positions. I've already got in my mind who will start against Korea in Perth, but look, everyone else that is on the bench will get their opportunity in the lead up and during the qualifiers."

Farina also confirmed that two players made themselves unavailable for the qualifiers, sighting contractual problems as the reason for them not making the trip. He would however not say whether this would rule them out of the Olympic Games if Australia qualified.



Olympics coach Frank Farina believes his squad can get the job done in time for Athens 2004.

"Obviously there were two players that made themselves unavailable in Patrick Kisnorbo and Brad Jones, who would have come into contention as well. It's disappointing, more so from their perspective, I honestly believe they were ill advised by their management. But that is there choice and my focus is on qualifying for the Olympic Games and as are the rest of the players here."

The inclusion of several players from the Under 20 team might have raised a few eyebrows, but Farina believes they all offer the team something different and have earned the right to be there regardless of their age.

"We had Spase in our camp in Europe (Germany) when we initially went over there for two games late last year and he did very, very well. Obviously he was involved with the Under 20's, so he has always been a player in the squad or in the back of my mind, so he is not a real surprise.

"I suppose the only one you could look at that came out of the blue was Anthony Danze, who quite impressed me whilst he was with the Under 20's. He gives us something to what we've got in terms of the rest of the midfield.

"He is a player that gets forward very well, always popping up in scoring positions and scores goals from midfield, which is always a big bonus to have. He is one of these players, whether it is intentional or not, he makes very good late runs into the box from midfield. He gives us something that will help us."

Farina also dispelled the theory that the qualifiers will be a walk in the park for his team and that there will be a lot of big scores in the qualifying tournament.

"I think the island countries enjoy playing against the bigger countries, as it is the only way they learn. I personally don't think there will be any blowouts.

"Fiji will always provide stern opposition and they will be a tough match."

As expected Switzerland-based Ljubo Milicevic was named captain with Farina glowing in his praise for the big defender.

"He has the pedigree from the Under 20's. He is a good leader, the lads like him and he organises very well. He will do a very good job for us."

Milicevic, who is only just starting to get his career back on track after suffering a bad knee injury at the 2001 World Youth Championships in Argentina, was obviously delighted to get the job.

"I was very honoured when given the opportunity in the past and no doubt delighted to be given the job again.

"I can't see us not qualifying. We have a few new faces, but it is a solid squad and we should do well."

from the

dressing sheds

by Mark Stavroulakis

GOOD KNIGHT

Melbourne Knights have applied to join this season's Victorian Premier League comp. "We are out. We don't want anything to do with the NSL any more. We've had enough of it," Knights director Tony Juric told the Herald-Sun. "We don't want a spot in the new (Australian Premier) league, we've wasted enough money.

"We have asked to go into the Victorian Premier League straight away. "Otherwise, we face a full year of inactivity if we don't get admitted into Victoria until 2005." "They'd be stupid not to let us in," Juric added.

"We have already got letters of support from seven of the 12 clubs willing to let us join and we're expecting three more to give us their consent in writing by next week.

"We are serious about rejoining Victoria and we believe we'll get better crowds in the Victorian Premier League than in the NSL. "We're playing the Auckland Kingz on Wednesday and I'll be lucky if we get 500 through the gates. "We'll have bumper crowds when we play Preston and Green Gully in the VSF."

NOT OVER YET FOR POWER

Parramatta Leagues club chief Denis Fitzgerald has revealed talks with Australian Soccer Association boss Frank Lowy about saving the Power. Fitzgerald told the Daily Telegraph: "I'm prepared to listen to what Frank Lowy has to say - I think most people would be. "He's a very influential, powerful and persuasive self-made man who is clearly not interested in wasting his time [in becoming involved in soccer]. "But until he says something to change our minds we will not be involved in next season's competition. "We will take a lot of convincing. You could say the jury is out until he comes back to us. "Frank Lowy is working hard to put things in place and we'll certainly have a look at what he comes up with."

Power general manager Angela Travis believes there is now grounds for tentative optimism. "The Leagues Club will keep it options open. We have a good team, a great coach and excellent infrastructure," she said. "It would be crazy to start a competition with 10 new teams, it would be like a kindergarten. "Our problem has been attracting crowds and creating interest.

The new competition will clearly need a substantial marketing budget. "I personally believe we might yet survive. We have sponsors who want to stay involved and others who want to come on board."

HOLMAN'S WAY

What a way to start the year of for one of Australia's most exciting talents Brett Holman. Having had the door shut on Brett by Ange in the U20 squad for the UAE, the current Excelsior star has made the first step into Frank Farina's squad for the Athens 2004 Olympics.

Not bad at all - all Brett needs now is a call from Feyenoord boss Bert van

Marwijk stating that a first team spot is available, ending his loan tenure with sister club Excelsior.

SNIFFING FOR JOBS

Due to the 10-team stance the competition will take during next season's reformed league, a number of coaches will find themselves searching for a club to coach. Not known as to who will make the final cut, a lot of lobbying has already commenced with some coaches talking to rival squads even before a ball has been kicked for the new-year. Its rumoured that one such coach has gone all out in putting his hand up for up to 4 clubs next season.

CARDOZO BLUES

Its quite interesting to see that Olympic coach Peter Papanikitas has opted to leave striker Pablo Cardozo on the bench during its past two matches.

Known for being one of the most skilful players in the NSL, Cardozo left the Power last season on the hope that Olympic would offer him more game-time.

Will the trend of Pabz sitting on the bench stop? Only time will tell.

PARIS AND THE PLAYER

One Sydney National League player had the pleasure of spending some quality time at one of Sydney's favourite nightspots whilst Paris Hilton was here on holidays in Sydney.

Unable to unveil the name of this player, one thing's for sure, soccer players can claim the charm attribute as one of their best assets.

NEW YEAR SIGHTINGS

What a year 2003 was for many soccer fans across the globe. Australia shared many highs and low's, but most are hoping that 2004 will be the year that would bring them good fortune.

My New-Year's wish has been to see the game kick-off in fine style for the new reformed league under Frank Lowy.

Here's hoping for a big one, that and for Liverpool to get something going on in the English Premier League - come on lads.

As for the New Years festivities, a number of National League and Abroad based players were out and about in their respective cities having it 'LARGE so to speak on the last night of 2003.

Sydney's Watershed Hotel had a couple of familiar faces from the Australian soccer circle.

Parramatta Power's Peter Zorbas, Sydney Olympic's Iain Fyfe and Joey Schirripa, West Ham United's Trent McClenahan and Empoli's Nick Stavroulakis showed that soccer players do know how to party strutting their stuff on the dance-floor.

Schirripa, born and bred in Griffith stated to ABSW that "there's nothing like having a New Year's back at home but Sydney will do for now".

Across the town at the Anthony Doumanis residence, a costume party played host to a few known NSL players.

Sydney United's Anthony Doumanis, Olympic's George Goutzioulis and Power's Andrew Durante got into the costume spirit by dressing up in their favourite gear - costume of the night apparently went to Goutzi who dressed up as "the cardinal".

Overall, fun was enjoyed by all who went crazy in good old Australia - as the saying goes, there's no place like home.

DOUMANIS' BIGGEST FAN

It is a common and known factor that most sports-people today rely heavily on various people in their lives that help or assist them in anyway, shape or form when it comes to their performances on the field.

Soccer players rely heavily on either their mothers, fathers, girlfriends or wives but one such player holds his younger brother as his biggest fan.

Evan Doumanis, an aspiring Pro Evolution playstation fan regards his brother Anthony as the "the best player in the world".

"Little Doumanis", is always present at every Sydney United home match and will get to as many away games as possible cheering his brother on.

Known for being one of the trickiest players in the National League, Anthony's ability to beat players with ease has always been a sight to see for any Australian soccer fan.

Evan believes that his brother has what it takes to go all the way and that he hopes to one day watch him play in either the English, Italian or Spanish league.

Sure they've both shared some bumps and bruises along their brotherly love ways but one thing's for sure, the pair have a high amount of respect for each-other.

Anthony's other biggest fan, although not human is his pet dog Milo. The little 'Jack Russel" K-9 certainly packs a punch as this reporter found out the hard way when good old Milo resisted to un-latch his teeth on some new shoes bought over Christmas!

WOLVES LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

The battling Wollongong Wolves are looking slightly more stable towards next year's imminent drastic review of the national competition with possible new soccer franchise groups taking the limelight and well known identities retiring completely or disappearing into lower leagues.

The Wolves ambitious General Manager Robert Rossi with youthful enthusiasm and support of his marketing staff came up with the initial step to raise the 'millions' required to keep a NSL club alive in Illawarra.

An offer to around 50 willing sponsors raised $100,000, securing operations for the time being.

Each business or organization parted with $2000 first up in return for several offered benefits like admission to VIP areas of WIN Stadium for home games, Shirt sponsorships, ground advertising, match program adverts.

Their support was greatly appreciated by the Wolves who are now hoping to attract larger sponsors to keep the 'ship' afloat for the exciting new episode of NSL football in 2004.

Restructuring of the national league will most likely see soccer win recognition nationwide in the print media and television.

This will be attractive to large cashed-up Co-operations always eager to convince new customers to purchase their produce.

Illawarra Soccer needs to get their act together and come out in numbers to support NSL soccer. A local NSL team, if successful , is of benefit to South Coast youngsters to aim for 'greatness' in soccer.

Market demands or offerings bring with it movement of players if willing to excel, hopefully able to remain in town instead of going to other locations and clubs.

2004 can make or break soccer fame in Illawarra asking all fans for support in any way - small or large - to keep the NSL dream alive in Wollongong.

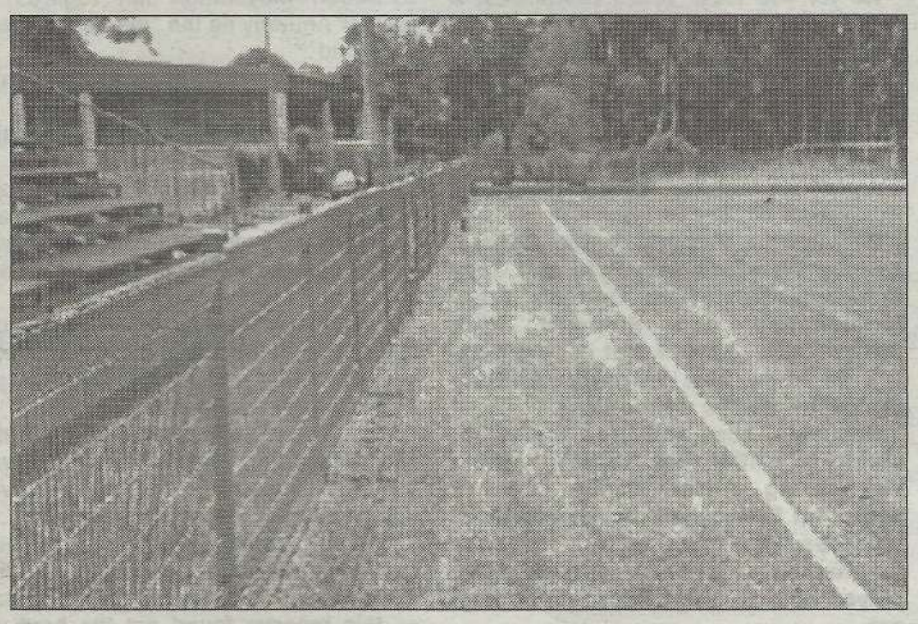
(Story courtesy by Otto Bader)

photooftheweek

Caught in mid-air and nowhere to go, English players tussle for the ball during the Christmas break - one thing's for sure, Kung-Fu is certainly on the player above's agenda.

FROM THE SIDELINES

WITH GREG STOCK



Petkovic takes on challenge

Ivan Petkovic has been announced as the new Rockdale City Suns coach, replacing caretaker Richard Plesa.

A former player with Rockdale and coach of Sydney United, Petkovic takes over a club in crisis after the departure of previous boss Bill Pilovski after just three games.

Having met his new squad at training last Sunday, he will have three sessions with his squad this week before an away visit to Blacktown City.

Aschner back

Former Golden Boot Winner Jimmy Aschner has re-signed with his former club Bonnyrigg White Eagles during the Christmas break.

Having recently arrived back from a working holiday in the United States, Aschner waster no time linking up with his former club with the deal seeing him through to the end of the season.

"I am very happy to be back at Bonnyrigg and looking forward to the Canterbury game this weekend," said Aschner.

Having been pursued by a couple of other clubs, his familiarity with the setup at The Serbian Centre and an opportunity to play under coach Ljube Jancev finally swayed his decision.

"The setup at Bonnyrigg is great and they were always keen to have me back as they had kept in touch with me while I was away.

I have never played under Ljube (Jancev) but he has a very good reputation so I am looking forward to having a good season and hopefully scoring a few goals."

Coach Ljube Jancev welcomed Aschner's addition as a positive move and is looking forward to seeing his new signing in action this weekend against Canterbury-Marrickville at Henson Park.

"Jimmy is a quality striker and we are pleased to welcome him back to his old club," said Jancev.

"He will train with us this week and depending on how he goes we will make a decision on whether we will start him or have him come off the bench at some stage in the match."

A tough challenge in the recent Bonnyrigg — Rockdale clash

White Eagles news

In other Bonnyrigg news, defender Tayfun Devrimol has left the club for trials with an unnamed Turkish First Division club.

Coach Ljube Jancev has a contingency plan already in place with ex Fraser Park stopper Matthew Percy close to signing with the club this week.

Striker Emmanuel Papageorgiou is another who looks headed for Europe, with trials lined up in Greece for the likeable forward.

He is due to fly out at the end of January with Jancev keen to utilize his services right up until his departure. Midfielder Richard Harrison is rumored to be in dispute with the club after being replaced in the White Eagles midweek game against Rockdale.

Berries pull out

Canterbury are another club who are tinkering with their squad, coach Greg Woodhouse confirming that striker Andy Amegashie and midfielder Con Paradisis will be leaving the club.

The enigmatic Amegashie is on the lookout for a winter league club, while Paradisis has succumbed to his chronic leg injury and announced his retirement from the game.

Woodhouse currently has a young striker trialling with the club with a decision on his signing expected later this week.

Marc's slow recovery

Bankstown City stirker Marc Hoenselaars has suffered another slight setback in his comeback from an ankle injury.

Bankstown City Lions face a tough away trip to Canberra this weekend

Instead of being able to resume training in the week prior to Christmas, Hoenselaars felt a slight twinge in the ankle and under instructions from his doctor decided to postpone the comeback until after the break.

"We are crying out for a player of Marc's ability in the team but with an injury like this we really can't afford to rush it," said Lions coach Andy Papoulias.

"We are confident Marc will begin slow running this week and could be ready for us in about three to four weeks."

Zabaks in UK

A Christmas card arrived last week from former Canterbury and Rockdale City Suns goalkeeper Phil Zabaks who has been with the reserve team of Accrington Stanley in the United Kingdom.

Zabaks is due home at the end of February to renew his Visa but not before a four-week stint with the famous 'Hopwood Academy' in Middleton.

Run by the legendary Jim Petruzi, Zabaks will go through four weeks of intensive training in all aspects of goalkeeping before returning to Australia for three months before returning to the United Kingdom in May for more trials.

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Family Connections at Manly Vale

Back in 1960, Manly Vale was known as Brookvale Soccer Club (which started in 1951).

However, after a number of officials and players left to form the Curl Curl Soccer Club, it was discovered that nearly all of the remaining members lived in the Manly Vale area. So for the 1961 season, it was decided to rename the club Manly Vale.

At the commencement of that season, Manly Vale had 12 junior teams, from under 8's to 16's. In that year, there were 68 junior teams in the Manly Warringah District, from seven clubs, namely Manly (19 teams), Dee Why (15), Manly Vale (12), Curl Curl (11), CYPC (5), CEBS (4) and St. Augustines with 2 teams.

All Association games were played on the Millers grounds No 1 to 6, with the occasional 'away' fixture up on the Manly West ground. This year, as it was back in 1961, most of our home games are played on the David Thomas Reserve, then affectionately known as Millers 4,5 and 6.

Over the years, Manly Vale Soccer Club has gained the reputation for being a family club, with several members of a family serving on the committee and playing as well. In the late sixties, we had the Barnes Family who had 4 sons playing, with father Jack as Gear Steward and mother Lois as President of the Ladies Committee.

Manly Vale's victorious men's All Age Division Five squad

The Wainwright family had a large influence on the club, with father Ted a coach for several years and 4 brothers all playing for the Club. John and Keith were both to have a hand in running the Club, John as President and Keith as Premier League Coach.

In 1978, when Manly Vale won the MWSA Premier League, there were two sets of brothers playing first grade. Paul, Mike and Sean Hennessy, and Alf and Dudley Smuts. Others that came to mind are the Smith Brothers - Mark, Joe, Pete and Jim, and the Greco family, with Casper and Ossie both playing for Manly Vale All Age teams. Ossie is still on the Club's Social Committee, and Casper is now the longest serving coach at Manly Vale and is presently the coach of our Premier League squad. Casper's better half, Connie, has served as Sub-junior and Junior registrar, as well as long serving Canteen Manager.

Another family that has put a great deal of time into the Club is the Sestanovich clan. Three boys - John, Michael and Frank, two of whom are still playing in the top Premier League team, whilst three of the family have also been President at one stage or another - Father Tony, mother Velma and Michael.

In 1970, the MWSA decided to have a gala day procession through Manly to celebrate the anniversary of Captain Cook's arrival, and clubs were asked to arrange floats for the procession. The Manly Vale Club decided to build a giant football boot from newspaper and cardboard atop a trailer. which was towed behind a maroon and white Holden. With one of the players inside the boot and a banner with the message "Cook sets sail for Manly Vale", the procession began at Queenscliff through Manly to Millers Reserve. Manly Vale won second prize for it's float !

In 1980, the Manly Vale Club set some sort of record by having it's Under 17 team win the State Cup in the Under 18 competition. In 1981, they were to win the competition again as an Under 18 team.

An outstanding player of that era was Ian Gray, who went on to play for Marconi, London club Arsenal, and went on to represent Australia at youth and senior levels. Ian retired in 1995 as Squad Captain.

Text and images coutesy of the excellent Manly Vale SC website, found at: www.mvsc.dragnet.com.au

Action from the 2003 women's grand final, won by Manly Vale

Two Stars a Galaxy Apart

They might be at opposite ends of the footballing spectrum but two players making waves in the Premier League are Canterbury defender David Cervinski and Bankstown midfielder Robert Mileski. While the former is a veteran of ten plus seasons in the rough and tumble world of the National Soccer League, the other is a highly talented attacking midfielder who is looking to go places over the next few seasons.

After winning four championships and appearing in six Grand Finals in the NSL, Cervinski found himself in the most unlikely situation at the end of last season, unwanted by new Wolves coach John Turner. Instead of returning to his hometown of Melbourne, 'Shovel' as he is affectionately known decided to accept an offer to play Premier League with Canterbury-Marrickville and has so far been one of the most influential players from his spot at sweeper. "I was very disappointed to have left Wollongong, but the bottom line for me was that there was no money available to sign me," said Cervinski.

"I have a young family with two children and when your living interstate and training six days a week there are expenses and sadly we couldn't agree to terms. I had played during the winter with Cringila in the Illawarra Premier League to keep fit and when I spoke to Greg Woodhouse and he made an offer I thought I'd give it a shot." What was Wollongong' loss is definitely the Berries gain as Cervinski has been amongst his sides best players for every one of the five games played so far. From his position in the middle of defence, he his near nigh unbeatable in the air putting opposition strikers under immense pressure and starting a number of his teams forward forays from the very last line of defence. "I am really enjoying playing in the league and I have been very impressed by the standard," said Cervinski.

"There is not a great deal of difference with the National League to be perfectly honest especially when your rubbing shoulders with the likes of Paul Urlovic, Nick Orlic and Zlatko Arambasic each week. I could have gone back to play with the Melbourne Knights but Stuart Young and myself have started a coaching clinic down in Wollongong and now that I have picked up some full-time work I am starting to enjoy my football again." On the aims for the rest of his season, Cervinski is not getting carried away but sees a lot of potential in the Berries team.

"The main aim for me playing with Canterbury was to try and put a little bit back into the game. So far our results have been mixed but we have the makings of a good side, we just have to put out heads down a bit more and the results should come." In contrast Lions midfielder Robert Mileski is a player with a mission. At just seventeen years of age, he has already made quite an impression with his club deputizing for the injured Marc Hoenselaars and helping his club rocket to the top of the Premier League table.

Setting up a goal for Matthew Borg in his first appearance off the bench against Parramatta Eagles was followed by a man-of-the-match performance against Blacktown City where he scored one and set up another. Another positive outing against the Coasties just before christmas has Mileski' cementing his spot in the Lions first grade side.

But the teenager is taking everything in his stride, concentrating on one match at a time as he seeks to establish his footballing career. "It has been a great past few weeks for me and I have been really enjoying the opportunity to be a part of the first grade team," said Mileski.

"I have been with the club for the past few seasons and have only trained with the seniors on a couple of occasions but this year it has been great to be training and playing amongst so many good players." After making a couple of substitute appearances with the Lions over the past two seasons, Mileski has been promoted by Lions coach Andy Papoulias as part of his plans to develop the next generation of players. With Marc Hoenselaars on the injured list with an ankle problem Papoulias looked to Mileski to fill a hole but he impressed his 'gaffer' so much that he won the spot and has kept it the past two weeks.

"Robert is an exceptional talent," said Papoulias. "The one thing I really like about him is that he trains hard and listens. There is no ego or attitude with him, he just wants to learn and play and that's refreshing to have as a coach." While his next major hurdle will be to hold his spot upon the return Hoenselaars sometime after Christmas, Mileski isn't afraid to set his sights higher as he seeks to establish a full-time footballing career.

"The ultimate aim for any footballer is to be a full-time professional in Europe and that is definitely the aim for me," said Mileski. "In footballing terms I am still young so if I can stay here in Australia another year or so and finish my schooling then I'll look to trial overseas and see where it goes from there." In the meantime, Premier League fans can sit back and enjoy the skills of one of the league's emerging stars alongside one of it's most experienced.

AUSTRALIA'S OWN RED DEVILS

The Marrickville Soccer Football Club was founded in 1945 by Bruce Livingston, who as a student at Newington College played soccer each afternoon, after school, at Henson Park.

During 1945, two friendly matches were played against Drummoyne Club Under - 14 team. One match was lost and one won.

In 1946 the Club was formed along official lines and two teams were entered in the Canterbury and District Soccer Football Association, one Under-12 and one Under-14.

The foundation executive comprised of President, Mr A Ireland Snr., Secretary, Bruce Livingston, Treasurer, Mrs J E McKechnie.

The two teams performed well, with the Under-12 team finishing equal second with two other teams.

Two Members have been made life-members, Bruce Livingston in 1961 and Mr A Ireland in 1964.

The current President of the Club is Ron Royston, the Honorary Secretary of the Club is Tony Lowry and the Honorary Treasurer is Joe La-Kiss.

The number of teams and players have steadily increased over the years, with teams from Under 6's to All Ages.

The home ground has always been in the Marrickville District, infact it was not until 1958 that the Club finally settled on Mackey Park.

The Marrickville Council has steadily improved amenities and playing fields. Mackey Park now has three full size fields, one mini field, Kiosk, Dressing room, Toilet Facilities and now provides Referees.

The Marrickville Soccer Football Club will soon be celebrating it's 60th year anniversary in 2006 and the most recent Socceroo to come from the the Marrickville Red Devils is Tommie McCulloch.

Courtesy
www.marrickville-red-devils.org.au

SOCCER NSW

www.soccernsw.com.au

Belconnen Blue Devils

The Blue Devils have emerged as everyone's favourites to set the pace this season, after some very impressive early season performances.

Many expected Belconnen to be prominent, but under new coach Chris Tansey so well did they play and so good did they look, in pre-season especially, that they were soon labelled as the team to beat by most keen observers of the Premier League who had seen them.

The introduction of some good, experienced players like Alex Castro and the bulk of last season's quality side that had already distinguished itself for most of the last campaign augered well for this summer's tilt at the title.

But, once the season got under way, the lack of form of most of the other top sides, as much as any great brilliance from Belconnen themselves, marked the Blue Devils down as the team to watch.

The return of the experienced Toplica Popovich, the continued good form of David Arranz and Mike Katz, plus the successful introduction of both Anthony Galliozzi and Ilija Prenzoski have been real bonuses for the team, though the surprise absence of covering striker, Clinton Larfield, has to be put on the debit side for sure.

In addition Nick Purdue, who rejoined the side last season, has become a fixture now and has given the side a lot of stability.

The opening game against St George was a tough one and yielded a far-from-convincing point from the drawn game, but the form has stood up well with The Saints doing well ever since.

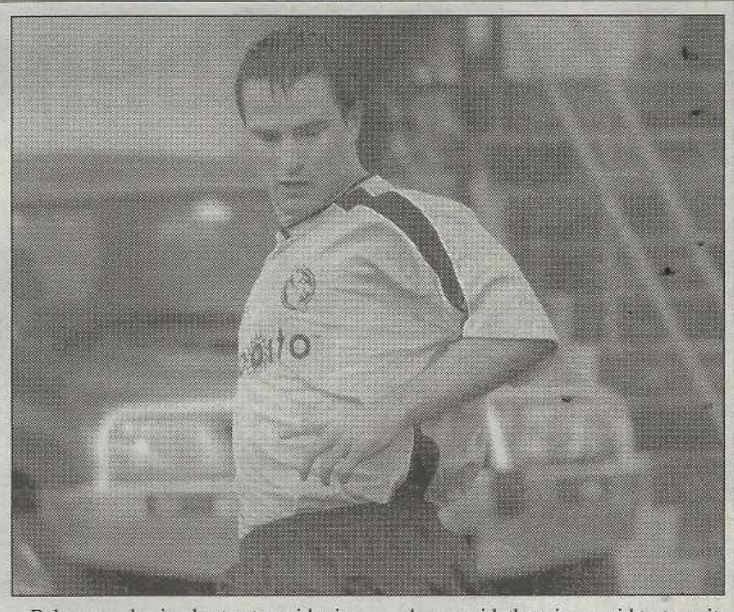
After beating Canterbury 4--0 at Henson Park and then disposing of Penrith fairly easily, at their McKellar Soccer Centre, Belconnen then went on to beat Parramatta 3-2 at Melita Stadium.

Such an impressive start had the division's supporters hailing the Canberra side as one of the best they had seen, but when they came back to Sydney a third time, to face Blacktown, it was a different story.

The Demons always had their measure in the most recent game and though the score was only 2-1 in favour of the home side the Blue Devils were not a patch on the side that had done so well up to that point.

Now comes the acid test for Tansey and his men; a big game at home to equal leaders Bankstown and a tricky trip to the Mingara Centre to play Central Coast.

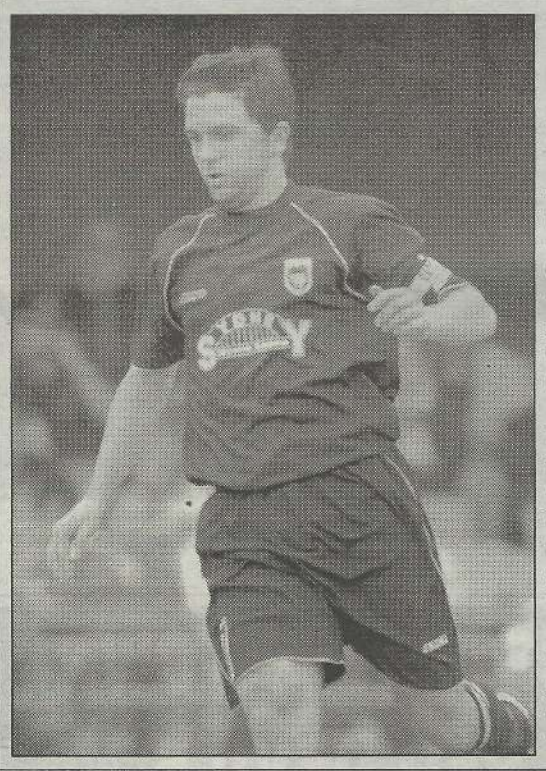
Prior to losing to Blacktown Belconnen had held a three point lead and it could have opened up a gap at the top. Now there is the very real possibility that they could even be toppled by Andy Papoulias and his men.



Belconnen, having beaten two sides in Sydney and only one at home, have to prove themselves this month.

They have to welcome Crescent Star and then travel to A.P.I.A.

As we said, there is an acid test awaiting this capable side. If they pull through it well, we could be looking at premiership material.



St George Saints

Most observers thought that the Saints would enjoy a good season, but there were question marks surrounding the fitness of some of their players.

Then there was the inability of the club to sign the promising Czech striker who had done well for them in the pre season games, due to visa problems.

Daniel Watkins also missed much of the pre season and was a surprise inclusion, off the bench, at Belconnen where two penalties, one at each end, allowed the spoils to be shared on the opening day of the season.

The Saints had Gabriel Mendez sent off that day, but bounced, right back, without their skipper, to beat Rockdale nicely a week later.

A small setback with a narrow loss at A.P.I.A. left them wondering how the form would stack up, but an excellent and very convincing win at Bonnyrigg restored the faith of the growing band of Saints' fans.

The team had already seen off Crescent Star, with a neat brace of goals coming from evergreen striker Bruno Beddoni and the future does indeed look bright for St George going into the next phase of matches.

The retirement of left sided defender, Nick Bolianitis, was a blow and the loss of Seb Sinozic, too, was keenly felt.

The likely loss soon of Mirko Jurilj to Malaysia, should the move go through, was also likely to hit the club hard, but the recent signing of Ante Deur should compensate.

While the partnership of Watkins and Beddoni has not really clicked yet and James Kovas seems just as likely to get a shirt to partner either of those older players, the goals have been coming often enough to secure the Saints a place among the leaders.

Their ten-point haul means that they can look forward to the rest of the season with much optimism.

Raphael Bove and Max Sevares have been doing a lot of very good work in the middle of the park.

The late start by defender Dean Culina has also helped give the side some stability once he arrived at full fitness to take his place at the heart of the defence.

The big performer has probably been the unheralded Adrian Webster, a former junior who came back from overseas with a wealth of experience which he has put to excellent use on the right flank.

Simon Verrender has matured as a player and is a very valuable man for coach Manny Spanoudakis to have around at the back as well.

Finally, the youngster Cristian Cevenini has proven a big hit, coming off the bench and will be a great weapon throughout the season especially when used as an impact player, no doubt.

In much the same way George Lagoudakis has been very instrumental on the wing and going forward in many of the club's matches.

With two home games to start the next phase of matches we can see St George Saints pushing hard to establish a break on the other clubs, since their next games, thereafter, all look very winnable.

Blacktown City Demons

The Demons are always slow starters and this season has been no exception.

While they started well enough with an opening day win at Penrith Panthers' Cook Park, St Marys ground, their draw at Parramatta a week later did not impress their supporters too much.

New signings Paul Urlovic, Josh Maguire and Marcus Phillips appear to have settled in very well, but the lack of depth, due largely to the salary cap restrictions, was felt after only a couple of matches due to players being out through injury and suspension and the club quickly found that there was very little cover.

The Demons missed Kain Rastall badly during the Parramatta game, having lost him to a red card the previous week and it was a couple of weeks before the best team could be selected again.

Ben Willard and Bishara Stephan both had to miss games due to injuries and that put pressure on the rest of the side.

Then came the Central Coast match at The Gabbie Stadium, one that could have proven costly had so many others among the top clubs not begun just as scratchily as The Demons.

The Coasties battled away and were rewarded with a second half winner to dent the Demons' aspirations of heading the competition by the time of the holiday recess.

Blacktown then travelled to Jensen Park, only to be thumped 3-2 by Bankstown, whose Matt Borg grabbed a hat trick.

It was not the result Brian Brown and his men needed right then and it put the pressure on them once more.

One win in three was sub-standard and the nature of the two losses was a little worrying.

Those concerns were dispelled, however, a week later when the team bounced back to comprehensively defeat Belconnen at The Gabbie.

This was much more like the Blacktown of old. Dominant and dedicated, the Demons made Belconnen look just ordinary and their 2-1 win was sound and thoroughly deserved.

If fringe players like Paul Karbon, Stephan, Brian Venega and Gehan Loke can stay off the injured list and the regulars do indeed perform consistently we should see a Blacktown side back on top of the ladder before too much longer.

The game against Rockdale that restarts the campaign is interesting, given that the Suns have a new coach ready to take his side further up the ladder and Rockdale pulled off a shock on the same ground last season.

The game at A.P.I.A. a week later is another crucial one. This season the Demons get to travel first but that may work in their favour as they do seem to do better at Lambert Park than at home; so they should not mind that one bit.

Wins in these two games would set things up nicely for Blacktown but after a rest of three weeks it will be interesting to see if the side can maintain the momentum it gained from the Belconnen win.

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Sydney Crescent Star

Four years ago, Crescent Star were just another club plying their trade in the Third Division of the state league.

As at January 1st 2004 they are sitting in fourth spot on the Premier League competition table just a solitary competition point from top spot.

Talk about a heady rise. So what has been the secret for their success given they were tipped by many pundits to finish in the bottom four at their first attempt in the Premier League. Coach Yasin Ozdenak is as bemused as anyone.

"Our aim for the first five games of the season was just to survive and to try and be as competitive as we could," confirmed Ozdenak.

"But here we are in the top five and things are a lot brighter than we had expected."

After winning the Premiership/Championship double in last seasons Winter Super League there were a lot of question marks on the team and it's ability to rise to the challenge of the second most difficult league in Australia. Losing gun striker Tanju Balabanel and midfielders Hussein Jomaa and Huseyin Bayhan haven't seemed to slow them down any with a number of newer faces taking the baton and running with it.

Up front Hans Sevgin has been a dynamo and alongside Joe Bruni they are probably the quickest strikers in the league.

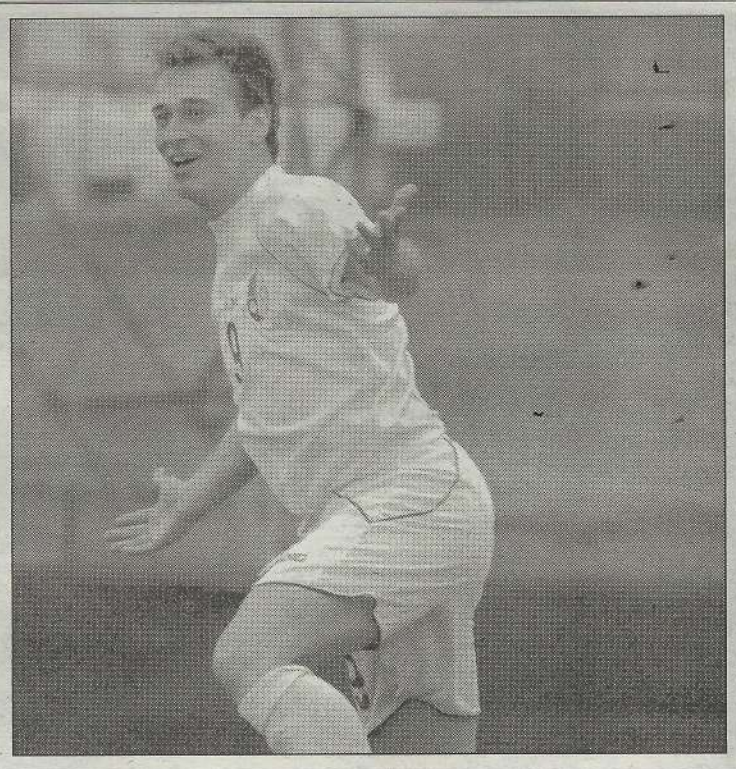
Just in behind Yavus Ekinci is still as enterprising as ever with Terry Atsas providing the midfield inspiration. In defence Askin Oygur and Angelo Petratos have the back nailed down strongly with youngster Michael Cindric showing he could be another to watch as the season progresses.

"The basis of our side I am very happy with," continued Ozdenak. "What we lack in skill we more than make up for with enthusiasm, and as a team we are doing all the positive things and that is pleasing. But our main problem is the lack of two or three quality players. And if we can solve that problem before the end of January then we will improve."

The loss of goalkeeper Steve Tolios to a second broken leg this year is another crushing blow and finding a suitable replacement could be the difference between continuing their good start to the season or struggling.

"Ali Akbal will fill in at this stage, but with no disrespect to him, we will keep our options open," said Ozdenak.

"Three wins and two losses at this stage of the year is more than acceptable, but how we play in January and early February will determine just how far we can take it this year."



Bankstown City Lions

What a difference twelve months makes in football. January 2003 was one of the most traumatic months in the history of Bankstown City but a full year on, the future looks very bright for one of the most underachieving sides in the league. So what has changed?

A new coach, a vastly more experienced squad, a couple of handy strikers and a teenager who looks like being one of the finds of the season.

"If you had have told me before the season started that I would be in equal first on 10 points after 5 games, I'd have thought you were mad," said coach Andy Papoulias.

"With me being new to the club and having a number of new players I was always of the opinion that it would take us until christmas just to find a combination, let alone make any real inroads.

"So full credit to the team, they are responding at training and playing some good football and that is exciting to see."

A former United States International, Papoulias has bought a new professionalism to the club which had been missing last season. His decade long career in the Greek First Division and North American Soccer League standing him in good stead to lift the ailing Lions.

Throw in a couple of exciting new players in the form of Geoff Dwyer, Zarko Glavas, Steve Liavas and Dimitri Nicolaou.

Add the dynamic duo – Matthew Borg and Marc Hoenselaars, and top that off with young excitement machine Robert Mileski and all of a sudden the Lion has some bite to it.

"While our results have been positive we are doing things on a bit of a shoe string at present, " continued Papoulias.

"Paul Wearne and Marc Hoenselaars have missed games with injury, while visa problems have kept Fernando De Los Santos in New Zealand, so if you give me those three guys it could be a vastly different side.

"But having said that the guys we have are doing a great job and if we keep going about our work the same way we have been, we could have a very good year."

Two of last years squad who look a lot more steady than they did in 2003 are Richard Luksic and Robert Gomez. Luksic has been a tower of strength at the back continually turning defence into attack with his long raking passes, while Gomez has responded well to Papoulias' gameplan of a quick counterattack and is relishing the extra space.

"Richard and Robbie are shaping up well and their commitment at training in helping the younger players has been outstanding," said Papoulias.

Providing their new general can keep it together for January and February there is no reason why Bankstown can't return to the final series.

"Our aims are modest at this stage of the year and you don't want to get too carried away with bold predictions early in the season," said Papoulias.

"We take it one game at a time and keep reassessing our aims as we go along."

A.P.I.A. Leichhardt

By Paul Goodwin

A.P.I.A. coach Les de Celis got some welcome news just after Christmas when he found that key defender Andrew Clark had turned down an offer to play in Singapore and would be staying with the Tigers for the rest of the season.

The Tigers began poorly with a shock 3-1 home loss to newcomers Sydney Crescent Star.

It was a high quality game but A.P.I.A.'s many new players failed to find their feet first up and team understanding just wasn't there for this first match despite a thorough pre -season preparation.

Scoring goals looked difficult for the side and it took until its fifth game at home to Penrith to score more than once in a game.

After losing that game to Crescent Star the A.P.I.A. men went down at Bonnyrigg's Serbian Centre by the a 2-1 scoreline a week later.

They played well enough but enjoyed no luck in front of goal.

In many ways the team looked better than it had done against Crescent Star, but it was still not enough.

A good test was provided a week later by the visit of St George.

With newcomers James Monie, David Barrett, Cristian Care and Robbie Stanton taking time to settle in the Tigers were not at all convincing in beating the Saints 1-0, but it was a start.

Key defender Andrew Clark missed one game, after heading overseas for trials, but then announced that he was staying, which was music to the ears of his club and their supporters.

Monie began to look a little more menacing by the time the break arrived in late December and both Barrett and Stanton also looked more ready than they had in the first few games.

Coach Les de Celis was less impressed with the early form of Care and Tony Alilovic, though the latter did look better in one of his more recent games.

There is little doubt that the signings may not have ceased and if some players do not perform then changes could well be rung sooner rather than later at Lambert Park.

After a workmanlike 1-1 draw at Henson Park, against Canterbury-Marrickville, A.P.I.A. came out and beat Penrith in its last game by 2-0.

It should really have been a lot more but somehow star striker Zlatko Arambasic could not fire in the penalty area in this game and it needed goals from Monie and Tome to settle the issue in the end.

The club faces a very tough programme over the next few weeks. It has to tackle the likes of Blacktown, Bankstown and Belconnen after it has seen off Parramatta this weekend.

The Tigers will look to the midfield to grind out some results for them and a decent share of ball to the front runners.

James Stubbs-Mills will be missing due to injury for around a month, but tough-tackling defender, Tony Tesoro, will be back soon to shore up the defence and a bit of shuffling around of the team's resources should see the goals plugged nicely at one end and maybe some more created at the other.

If A.P.I.A. is to stake a claim for honours then it needs to win all of its coming games before teams like Blacktown and Bonnyrigg mount a rescue mission of their own.

If they don't then the other pretenders like St George and Bankstown will pile on the pressure leaving Belconnen with a much clearer run.

This season's competition is the tightest ever and A.P.I.A. know that only too well.

What they don't want is to be caught up in a bottle neck below the top; they want to be right up there leaving the rest to fight out the minor placings.

We will know in a few weeks' time if the club's new signings have 'gelled' or if reinforcements need to be called in.

At this stage anything other than a win at Parramatta would be unacceptable and a loss to Blacktown a week later could be catastrophic.

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FIRST GRADE TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	Pts
Belconnen Blue Devils	5	3	1	1	11	5	6	10
Bankstown City Lions	5	3	1	1	11	7	4	10
St George Saints	5	3	1	1	7	3	4	10
Sydney Crescent Star	5	3	0	2	8	4	4	9
Blacktown City Demons	5	2	1	2	7	5	2	7
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	5	2	1	2	6	6	0	7
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	5	2	1	2	5	5	0	7
Parramatta Eagles	5	1	3	1	8	6	2	6
Rockdale City Suns	5	1	2	2	5	7	-2	5
Canterbury Marrickville	5	1	2	2	3	8	-5	5
Central Coast United	5	1	1	3	3	10	-7	4
Penrith Panthers	5	1	0	4	2	10	-8	3

GRADE 20 TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	Pts
Parramatta Eagles	5	4	1	0	15	2	13	13
Belconnen Blue Devils	5	3	2	0	9	2	7	11
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	5	3	1	1	14	8	6	10
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	5	2	2	1	10	9	1	8
Blacktown City Demons	5	2	1	2	6	10	-4	7
Bankstown City Lions	5	2	1	2	9	14	-5	7
Canterbury Marrickville	5	2	0	3	6	12	-6	6
Central Coast United	5	1	2	2	7	7	0	5
Sydney Crescent Star	5	1	2	2	8	9	-1	5
Penrith Panthers	5	1	1	3	9	10	-1	4
St George Saints	5	1	1	3	6	8	-2	4
Rockdale City Suns	5	1	0	4	5	13	-8	3

NEXT ROUND 6

FIRST GRADE

HOME TEAM		AWAY TEAM	DATE	KICK-OFF	GROUND
Penrith Panthers	v	Sydney Crescent Star	Sat. 10th Jan.	7.00pm	Cook Park
St George Saints	v	Central Coast United	Sat. 10th Jan.	7.00pm	St George Stadium
Blacktown City Demons	v	Rockdale City Suns	Sat. 10th Jan.	7.00pm	Gabbie Stadium
Belconnen Blue Devils	v	Bankstown City Lions	Sat. 10th Jan.	7.00pm	McKellar Soccer Centre
Parramatta Eagles	v	A.P.I.A. Leichhardt	Sun. 11th Jan.	6.00pm	Melita Stadium
Canterbury Marrickville	v	Bonnyrigg WE	Sun. 11th Jan.	5.00pm	Henson Park

GRADE 20

HOME TEAM		AWAY TEAM	DATE	KICK-OFF	GROUND
Penrith Panthers	v	Sydney Crescent Star	Sat. 10th Jan.	5.00pm	Cook Park
St George Saints	v	Central Coast United	Sat. 10th Jan.	5.00pm	St George Stadium
Blacktown City Demons	v	Rockdale City Suns	Sat. 10th Jan.	5.00pm	Gabbie Stadium
Belconnen Blue Devils	v	Bankstown City Lions	Sat. 10th Jan.	4.30pm	McKellar SC
Parramatta Eagles	v	A.P.I.A. Leichhardt	Sun. 11th Jan.	4.00pm	Melita Stadium
Canterbury Marrickville	v	Bonnyrigg WE	Sun. 11th Jan.	3.00pm	Henson Park

LEADING GOALSCORERS

7 **Matthew Borg (BCL)**

4 Daniel Macor (BBD)

3 Ilija Prenzoski (BBD), Ben Deighan (RCS)

2 Bruno Beddoni (SG), Hakan Sevgin (SCS), Filip Marzec (SCS), Manny Papageorgiou (BWE), Anthony Galliozzi (BBD), Zlatko Arambasic (ALT), Vic Costabile (PE), Luke Roodenburg (BCD), Demitri Nicolaou (BCL), Paul Urlovic (BCD), Aaron Burgess (BWE), Daniel Watkins (SG), Norman Tome (AL), Denis Alilovic (RCS),

1 Raphael Bove (SG), Josh Maguire (BCD), Marcus Phillips (BCD), David Barrett (ALT), George Issa (SCC), Yavuz Ekinci (SCS), Matthew Clowes (PE), Jamie Subat (CCU), Daniel Surridge (CCU), Jason Connolly (PP), Greg Collins (BWE), Alex Asanovic (BCL), Sam Larocca (CMO) Nathan Byrn (CCU), Anthony Mittiga (PE), Allan Picken (CMO), Jason Sciberras (PP), David Harding (CMO), Simon Catanzaro (BCD), Daniel Borg (Parramatta), David Arranz (BBD), Scott Conlon (BBD), David Brewer (CCU), Robert Mileski (BCL), Marc Falzon (CCU), George Lagoudakis (SG), James Kovas (SG), James Monie (AL) Daniel Willoughby (SCS), Costello De' Andre (SCS), Ben Delicata (PE), Nathan Rivera (PE)

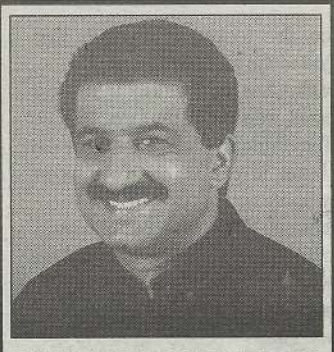
NSW PREMIER LEAGUE TIPPING COLUMN

PAUL GOODWIN
SOCCER NSW JOURNALIST
DRAW
ST GEORGE SAINTS
BLACKTOWN
BELCONNEN
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
BONNYRIGG

Points = 10

TARYN ROCKALL
NSW SAPPHIRES CAPTAIN
DRAW
ST GEORGE SAINTS
BLACKTOWN
BELCONNEN
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
DRAW

Points = 6



ANDY PASCHALIDIS
ELITE SPORTS TRAVEL
CRESCENT STAR
ST GEORGE SAINTS
BLACKTOWN CITY
BELCONNEN
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
CANTERBURY

Points = 11

GREG STOCK
SOCCER NSW JOURNALIST
PENRITH
ST GEORGE SAINTS
BLACKTOWN CITY
BELCONNEN
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
BONNYRIGG WE

Points = 7

'PEANUTS'
THE MONKEY
CRESCENT STAR
ST GEORGE SAINTS
BLACKTOWN CITY
BELCONNEN
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
BONNYRIGG WE

Points = 9

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ROUND 6 PREVIEW

WITH PAUL GOODWIN & GREG STOCK

St George Saints vs Central Coast United

Saturday 10th January at St George Stadium
Kick-off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

Both these teams have been real Jekyll and Hyde outfits so it will be interesting to see who can put their best foot forward after the Christmas break.

St. George have posted three wins from their past four starts but dropped points against A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt at Lambert Park three starts back.

Their best performance was their come from behind 2-1 win over Bonnyrigg in round five took them to equal first on ten competition points.

"We have started the season off in positive fashion, but the real test is yet to come," said coach Manny Spanoudakis.

"With cup games thrown-in it is a long season, and while it is great to be in equal first spot we realize that we still have a job to do and we can't afford to take any games lightly."

By contrast the Coasties season have posted two losses in their past four starts but in between times have beaten Blacktown City and picked up a valuable point from a draw with Bonnyrigg at The Serbian Centre. Despite lacking the overall experience of some of the other sides, the Coasties youngsters are really starting to fire and they could be a real handful if allowed to dictate the pace and flow of a game.

In seven previous visits to St. George Stadium, the Coasties have won two and drawn two. Last season, these two clubs played out one of the most attacking games of the season with the result favoring the home side 7-4.

Expect plenty of end-to-end action in this one as both sides start to build some momentum as this key stage of the year.

Parramatta Eagles vs A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers

Sunday 11th January at Melita Stadium
Kick-Off 6.00pm First Grade / 4.00pm Grade 20

These big guns of the past lock horns once more here at Melita Stadium, with the visitors starting hot favourites.

Parramatta managed good results in several games thus far, but haven't been winning too many. Good results against Blacktown, Rockdale and Bankstown plus a narrow loss at home to Belconnen suggests that the Eagles will be no easy pickings for the Tigers on Sunday.

Coach Trevor Morgan has got his side very well disciplined and capable of holding any team for long periods. Contrast that with A.P.I.A's inability to score as many goals as the supporters would wish and an abundance of experience that so far has failed to dominate games enough to put them beyond the reach of their opponents until quite late.

Norman Tome has been in good touch lately and James Monie is just beginning to fire now to provide Zlatko Arambasic with the support he needs.

Maybe A.P.I.A. will choose this game to find their shooting boots but matches between these sides in recent times have been tight and most will expect it to go down to the wire.

The Eagles are making the most of their young players of promise at the club by blooding them this season and the likes of Vic Costabile and Michael de Bono have had good starts to their first grade careers.

If Nathan Rivera and Englishman, Andrew Kane, can keep up their good showings then they could trouble the Apia defence. It is a defence that has a decent pedigree with David Barrett, Robbie Stanton and co all having sound credentials, as does Andrew Clark.

Blacktown City Demons vs Rockdale City Suns

Saturday 10th January at Gabbie Stadium
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

New Suns boss Ivan Petkovic faces a torrid start to his coaching tenure as he takes one of the toughest road trips in the league, a visit to Gabbie Stadium.

Blacktown have lost just three matches there in 2002/3 and despite a dusty showing against Central Coast United in round three (a 1-0 loss), they haven't lost two games at home for I couldn't tell you how long.

On paper at least there is a lot to like about the Demons, and with coach Brian Brown freshening his troops during the Christmas break they will take a power of beating.

The dysfunctional Rockdale forward line holds the key to this game.

Daniel Kukucka and Denis Alilovic have struggled to get good service in recent weeks, and it will be interesting to see if new coach Petkovic reinstates old warhorse Steve Karavatakis to the starting lineup in a bid to score goals.

For Suns fans desperate to see their star studded lineup fire it could well be another few weeks if rumours of player instability in the Rockdale camp are to be believed.

Breaking this game down into figures, in ten previous league visits to Gabbie Stadium stretching way back to 1982, Rockdale have won just the one game, a 2-1 win in round twenty-two last year.

Overall, the record is even worse for the Suns with just two wins from twenty league meetings, the Suns only other victory coming in 1994 by the narrowest of margins, 1-0.

Both sides have picked up four competition points from their last four starts.

Belconnen Blue Devils vs Bankstown City Lions

Saturday 10th January at McKellar Soccer Centre
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 4.30pm Grade 20

What an exciting game this promises to be! Belconnen, fresh from their loss at The Gabbie, but still holding a share of the lead, against a side that leapt to the front after a stuttering start to the campaign and now appears to be right on song.

Losing to Blacktown away is hardly soul searching stuff and if Belconnen keep their feet on the ground and defend sensibly they should be good enough to repel an adventurous Bankstown City Lions side that is stacked with talent, experience and new players on the improve.

Matt Borg may be the league's tops scorer right now but he does have a lot of support up front and the goals can just as easily come from the likes of Alex Asanovic or Robert Mileski, the latter proving a real find this season. At just 18 years of age, the tall Mileski is the perfect foil for Borg whose confidence must be steadily climbing once more after five goals in his last two games. Belconnen will be relying on their solid defence and sound organisational skills, plus a businesslike midfield to sort this one out.

Goals are not arriving in great abundance, but they are coming from the midfield which is a healthy sign. Bankstown's record in Canberra has been quite good over the years and they won't mind travelling to the nation's capital for this one. The hospitality will be excellent, after the game especially, but no quarter will be offered to Andy Papoulias' men during the 90 minutes of play.

Expect a healthy turn out for a game that neither will want to end in a draw since that might let a new leader emerge after the weekend. It should be a positive match for the spectator and if Daniel Macor can get back into scoring touch - he may well overhaul Borg at the top of the scorers' list or at least draw much closer.

Canterbury-Marrickville vs Bonnyrigg White Eagles

Sunday 11th January at Henson Park
Kick-Off 5.00pm First Grade / 3.00pm Grade 20

Welcome back Jimmy Aschner. After a year on a working holiday in the United States, the former Golden Boot winner returns to the White Eagles, to find his old coach Greg Woodhouse will be the one opposing him this week.

"Jimmy is a quality striker and an exceptional talent and it will be interesting to see how he performs first up," said Canterbury coach Greg Woodhouse.

With all the focus being on the visitors, the home side will need to lift it's game appreciatively if they are to be in the contest.

Their 2-0 loss to Crescent Star in round five was nothing short of deplorable with Woodhouse justified to swing the axe on as many as five players.

While Bonnyrigg coach Ljube Jancev ponders on whether to start Aschner or play him from the bench, he will also have to fill a hold at the back. Tayfun Devrimol has taken off to Turkey for trials but Jancev should have ex Fraser Park stopper Matthew Percy available if his paperwork clears in time. Richard Harrison is also in dispute with the club and will be missing forcing a reshuffle in the midfield.

On paper, the honors have been shared. In 46 previous league meetings stretching way back to 1977, the record stands at 17 wins for Canterbury, 17 wins for Bonnyrigg and 12 draws.

Last year, the Berries undid the White Eagles at The Serbian Centre 2-1 with Paul Bourke scoring a couple of crackers, while at Henson Park, the visitors exacted some revenge by the scoreline of 3 goals to nil.

Penrith Panthers vs Sydney Crescent Star

Saturday 10th January at Cook Park
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

Following the team's dismal showing over recent weeks and the failure of the strikers to, well, strike, Panthers' coach Tony Rasmussen will rush Jason Connolly back from suspension to play up front, possibly alongside skipper Luke O'Connell, with the out of form Adam Anderson and Tim O'Connell also under consideration.

No real problems with the rest of the side, of whom Luke Boyd is in great touch and the defence is working very hard. The defence may have made mistakes but they have been under a lot of pressure due to an attack that has failed to fire.

Newcomer Roger Galayini shows much promise going forward and is one of the positive signings thus far. Some of the others have yet to show their best.

Crescent Star are sure to play a very open game and will fully test the home side at Cook Park.

Penrith has to sort out its best combination and will be doing a lot of thinking before tackling this match. Sydney Crescent Star are not likely to ease their foot off the pedals after some solid showings thus far.

Visitors to the St Marys ground should indeed see a good spectacle and little love will be lost between the two sides, with Penrith likely to be the hungrier of the two this time.

Crescent Star has made quite an impression already and it will be interesting to see how the break has affected them.

An interesting player who scored the winner in their latest game is Costello de Andre Hog who has been around a while but is a great surprise packet to unleash on unsuspecting opposition teams.

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NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE RESTRUCTURE

Second Division or Premier League?

By Paul Goodwin

With the coming deconstruction of the current National League at the end of the current season and the certain demise of a number of clubs, many in the game, especially in NSW - the most represented state - are considering their options for the future.

Member clubs of the NSW Premier League have been discussing the implications for them at their monthly meetings following suggestions that they give thought to what they want to do when the extra clubs, jettisoned by the NSL, seek to join them for their next summer campaign.

The much-touted but not fully explored national second tier league is one prospect for the clubs that look like dropping out and the same competition could also offer opportunities for existing NSW clubs to move one level higher, should they so decide.

No firm plans are in place to form a second division for the revamped national competition, but it seems that if it did get off the ground it would be heavily regionalised and NSW clubs might form the bulk of the membership.

Among the NSW Premier League clubs are several who once graced the game's highest level, some of whom these days have more modest ambitions.

It has been clear for some time that the level of spectator support, at state level, cannot sustain plans that are too ambitious; witness the salary cap imposed by the clubs themselves at the start of the current campaign, now five rounds in.

Canterbury-Marrickville, who once played in the northern NSL division at Arlington Oval, may be looking over their shoulders to see what Sydney Olympic do next, while Blacktown City Demons appear content to remain at The Gabbie and pursue NSW title honours. Having said that, Blacktown would not want to be left behind in the rush.

The seemingly more ambitious Bonnyrigg White Eagles, whose ground at the Serbian Centre has been steadily improved to the level where it is one of the best in the league, might consider the expense of joining a geographically broader-based league. But it does appear to be beyond even their resources at this stage.

Nevertheless, all clubs are keeping an open mind, none more so than one-time NSL regulars Parramatta Eagles, whose president Tony Azzopardi is still cautious.

"It is too early for me to say what we would do; far too early." Azzopardi explained.

"We are waiting to see what happens with a second division and if one is proposed we would have to talk about it with our members."

"We are interested in any system that provides for promotion and relegation on merit and not just a league that is by invitation." Azzopardi concluded.

The Premier League clubs meet monthly and the subject is still on the agenda; most realising that the excitement of playing among the bigger fish would come at a considerable cost.

Parramatta Eagles are already operating on a much-reduced budget this season and have done well with tightened purse strings under rookie coach Trevor Morgan.

Whether they would want to open those purse strings again, with renewed sponsor support, is another matter. It could be a very costly venture for them and their members.

Soccer NSW president, Tom A. Doumanis, has received feedback that 5 current NSW Premier League clubs are very interested in participating in an Eastern Board Competition.

"Soccer NSW Clubs participation in the new competition is imperative to allow a pathway for clubs to literally rise from the local association ranks, through to the state leagues and eventually to the National League".

Mr. Doumanis also indicated that he would be meeting with ASA representatives in the near future to discuss issues related to the promotion and relegation, as well as the funding of the proposed competition.

An NSL second division is likely to comprise teams from up to three states, plus the ACT and could be conducted under the auspices of the ASA or its newly formed NSL stand-alone body.

Alternatively the competing States' own controlling bodies could oversee the league independently, possibly with some tie-in with the new Australian Premier League.

The key issue would be promotion and relegation but a five-year protection for the APL clubs against such moves would mean a large investment for only the glimmer of a worthwhile return in the future.

Although the 5 year moratorium may actually be a blessing in disguise for clubs competing in the second tier competition as it would allow clubs to get

Like other clubs, Blacktown City are considering their Premier League options

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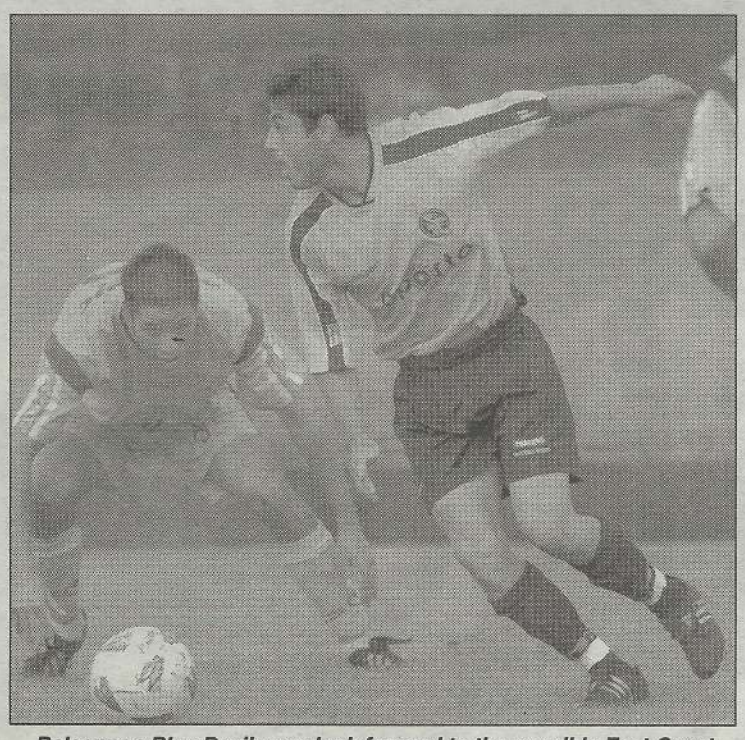

Belconnen Blue Devils can look forward to the possible East Coast League with some confidence

their houses and finances in order before making the next step to the national level.

The negative aspect of this venture may indeed be the demise of the existing top level competition and it's being pushed back to a winter competition, as it would be inconceivable to see two summer competitions co-existing and directly opposed to the newly formed NSL itself.

So, clubs looking at their options now will want to consider the different scenarios.

The next plausible option would involve those clubs who might be required to drop back to the next level; but that is another issue and one clubs would rather not face just yet.

Many may fear that by not putting their hands up to compete they may miss the boat altogether.

Penrith's view, expressed by club spokesman Mike Starr, is that they would want to be part of any enhanced competition, but would have concerns about the added costs due to travelling and the need to compensate players for the additional calls on their time.

"If we need to travel inter-state then our players will need to become virtual professionals, as we would need to find a way to ensure that they were not out of pocket.

"All of our players are part timers and once you start asking them to travel it means we would need to take care of them more financially. That may impose a burden on a club like ours, which is struggling to get crowds and sponsorship. But we are positive about the idea of participating, all the same." said Starr.

It would appear that if clubs like Wollongong, Newcastle and the five Sydney clubs came down into a new league it would only need the cream of the current clubs in the Premier League to make for a budget-conscious competition, with manageable travelling for everyone, allowing for one trip to Canberra each season.

If clubs from other states were to be included the question would need to be asked whether the standard was necessarily higher, whether clubs were prepared to spend the extra money on travelling and whether the clubs in other states would want to do the lions' share of the road trips, or air trips as might be more reasonable. The possibilities of employing "Double-Header" weekend's may help allay costs as is currenlty employed in the National Basketball League.

At this stage it looks as if many clubs are playing the waiting game with few wanting to be left in limbo. Until the composition of the new NSL is known much of it is mere conjecture.

Should the likes of Marconi, Sydney United and Sydney Olympic return to the fold those clubs would also want to examine the pros and cons of joining a regionalised second division with its attendant cost structure and reduced spectator appeal, or cutting their losses and sharing in a purely NSW venture.

The pre-emptive actions of Melbourne Knights in thinking of joining the Victorian Premier League right away may mean that any clubs to come from that state might need to be from among those former members of the NSL who have been out of the loop for some years now; clubs like Preston, for instance, though just how interested they are in playing against clubs as far afield as Queensland might be another matter.

They could well prefer to link with South Australian clubs and given the early and immediate success of Adelaide United it is hard to see second tier Adelaide clubs pulling enough support to make much of an impact, given the diminished crowds for Adelaide City and West Adelaide in the national competition during their later years.

So a lot of questions remain to be answered.

The Task Force report commissioned by the ASA, that led to the conclusion that a new 'Australian Premier League' be formed found, among other things, that any clubs leaving the NSL when it is disbanded be made welcome into the top competition in each state and that the states protect both players and clubs should any NSL club not be accepted into the any formed national competition.

In the absence of any official comment from the ASA on the thorny topic of a second tier competition the above appears to be the current view of the sport's national body, concerning this intriguing matter.

That and a 'wait and see' approach. Which is where we came in.

It is also relevant that the Task Force also recommended that the states drop the use of the name Premier from their leagues and that position is quite clear.

It should be an interesting few months.

Parramatta Eagles have done well in the NSL in the past, but budgets are much tighter now

Canterbury-Marrickville will be looking forward to potential matches against rivals Sydney Olympic

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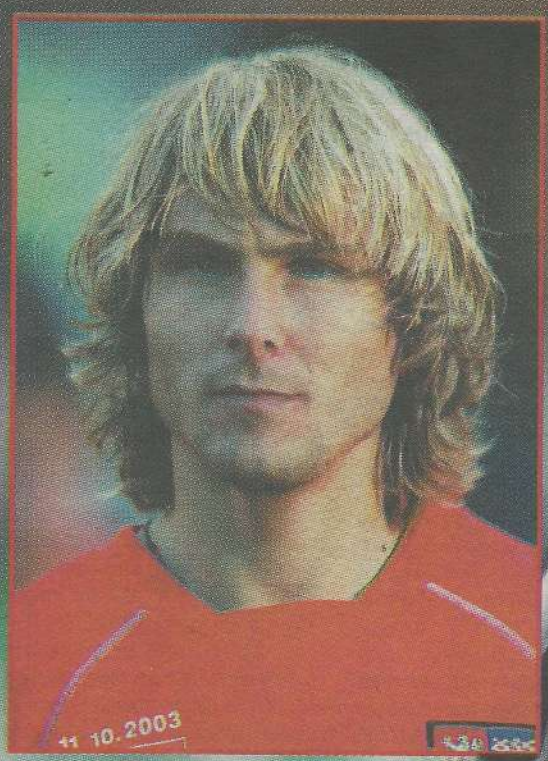

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